

# April BLUE BOOK



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## Murder Island

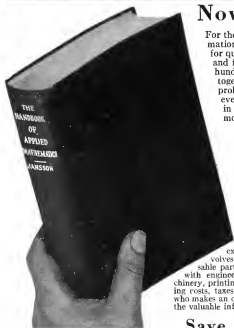
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by LELAND JAMIESON

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# BLUE BOOK



APRIL, 1934

MAGAZINE

VOL. 58, NO. 6

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A swift-moving and authentic novel of air-adventure by the pilot writer who gave us "Around the Clock" and "With the Night Mail."
- After Worlds Collide** By Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie 70  
The great climax to this deeply impressive novel of cosmic adventure.

## Remarkable Short Stories

- The Rambling Ram-Lamb** By Arthur K. Akers 27  
Our stove-colored detective trails a wandering husband—to a wild, wild battle.
- The Gold Bar** By H. De Vere Stacpoole 36  
This much-discussed commodity is vividly appraised in a colorful drama by a distinguished writer.
- War in the Wilderness** By Vingie E. Roe 44  
The famous author of "Nameless River," "The Splendid Road" and other noted books gives us a notable story of wild life in the mountains.
- The Drums of Omdurman** By William J. Makin 54  
An Anglo-American intelligence officer and a French beauty-surgeon deal with a strange revolt in Egypt.
- The Secret of Banda Sea** By Clarence Herbert New 92  
A mystery of tropic seas by the author of the celebrated *Free Lances* in Diplomacy.

## A Lively Detective Novelette

- Death for Cinderella** By Forbes Parkhill 106  
Here's a new and most engaging way to tell a mystery story—the author takes you entirely into his confidence at the start.

## Prize Stories of Real Experience

- The Blizzard** By W. D. Gay 129  
An appealingly told adventure of early days in Dakota.
- White Hunter** By Roger Courtney 133  
An Englishman joins a lion-hunt armed only with spear and shield.
- Abandon Ship!** By Captain Milton Hartman 136  
An old mariner tells of the most exciting of his seven shipwrecks.
- Drug-Store Detective** By Bill Adams 139  
A young drug-clerk undertakes to capture a counterfeiter single-handed.
- The Sky-High Wedding** By Frank Berkey 142  
They were married in a balloon—and the sky-chariot ran away with them.

- Great Expectations** Editorial 5
- The Soldier's Scrapbook** 105
- Cover Design** Painted by Joseph Chenoweth

*Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events.*

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# Great Expectations

EARLY in the Great War some one remarked that its ideal outcome, from the viewpoint of human progress and betterment, would be for Germany and Austria to defeat Russia, but for England and France to overcome Germany and Austria—that is, for the limited monarchies Germany and Austria, to defeat the absolute monarchy Russia, but for the democracies England and France to overthrow the limited monarchies, Germany and Austria.

Such a consummation, at that time, seemed absurdly impossible. For of course, Russia, France and England were aligned together against the Central Powers. And yet, that outcome which seemed so absurdly impossible was what came to pass.

There has been a great deal of pessimism, reflected in many books and magazine stories, over the alleged failure of the war. Too much, of course, was expected; it was the war which would end wars. And yet it did bring about that change which had seemed ideal but hopeless of achievement.

So too, there has been much despondency and cynicism about the imputed failures of many other splendid endeavors: the failure of that fine experiment Prohibition, in this and other countries, to end the evils of intemperance; the failure of the machine to provide universal comfort and leisure; the failure of the N.R.A. promptly to provide well-paid jobs for everybody. And much of this despondency, it seems to us, springs from one source: we expect too much; we too little appreciate what has been or is being accomplished.

A poet who has fallen out of favor with the all-wise literary gang—Tennyson—once wrote: "Yet I doubt not, through the ages, one increasing purpose runs—" And it seems to us, looking back over man's story as we know it, that with all his failures, that Purpose is still apparent—even though man's most desperate and tragic endeavors have been partial failures, even though many deserving people are still in bitter want.

We are not trying to preach, but simply to tell you that we do not propose in this magazine to offer you fiction which reflects this cynicism or despondency, for we do not think it justified. Nor do we intend to affront you with sugar-coated stories which deny the heartbreaks everyone must meet. . . .

We've tried hard to make this the best issue of Blue Book yet; like the infinitely larger endeavors mentioned above, it doesn't quite come up to our expectations. Still—we are progressing a bit, aren't we?

—The Editor.

# Murder Island

By LELAND JAMIESON

HELEN SAYLES, the English sportswoman, hours ago had taken off from Aëropuerto Machado in Havana; and now, as the sun sank blood-red beyond the Everglades to the west of Miami, her whereabouts remained a mystery. A group of newspaper men sat in the waiting-room at the MYCABA Thirty-sixth Street airport, held there by their assignments to interview Miss Sayles when she arrived. Some of them, after these hours of waiting in the swelter of humidity, sat motionless and silent, seeming not to care what had become of her, not even to be interested in mild conjectures of her fate. But others, perhaps filled with admiration for her courage, discussed her solo water hop, her daring flight in a tiny single-engined plane. It was, they were agreed, a hazardous undertaking for a woman, however skilled a pilot she might be. Their voices, modulated to a drone, sounded steadily in the vastness of the enormous waiting-room.

Dan Gregory, a MYCABA pilot in from Merida that afternoon, had changed his clothes, and now, out of uniform, passed from the traffic office into the arched room where these news men sat in conversation. He was tall, with brown hair and brown eyes, a sharp hooked nose and a jutting jaw. After a week of what he liked to call the half-civilization of Central America, he was anxious to get home to his apartment and a tall gin fizz.

But Lin Jackson, red-headed reporter for the *Herald*, knowing Gregory well, stepped from the group and intercepted him.

"You're the man I'm looking for," Jackson pounced upon him, as well as any five-foot-seven man could pounce

upon an individual of Gregory's size. "You just got in from Havana, Dan. What about this Sayles woman—Helen Sayles?"

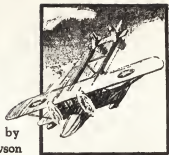
"Well," Dan retorted, looking with scant interest but some amusement at the group of men who eagerly approached him behind Jackson, "what about her? Is she press-agenting again? It looks that way, with all you birds ganged around out here to meet her." He grinned, and lit a cigarette, shoved the lighter back into his somewhat wrinkled linen trousers pocket. "Boy, what a delegation this has turned out to be!"

Jackson protested: "I'm serious, Dan. Helen Sayles left Havana two hours before you did, and nobody's heard a word from her. You didn't see anything of her plane floating in the water as you were coming over, did you? Do you think she had a chance of making it? If she's lost, do you think she might be able to orient herself and get back here? And if she's down, what chance would she have, at sea, of surviving?"

Dan Gregory looked at them all quizzically for a moment, dragged at his cigarette, started to depart suddenly, and then turned back. "Listen," he said, obviously disgusted. "You give me a pain. Figure out your own answers to your questions. Pilots with this outfit fly water-jumps that total up to twice across the Atlantic every day—not just once a year, but every day. There's nothing to it. Yet here's a dame who's after nothing in the world but publicity—trying a solo hop that a fifteen-year-old should make—and she comes up missing and you want to stop the presses for her. Where is she now? Well, don't



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you think she figures that you want to stop the presses for her—and doesn't she like that! So where do you suppose she is?" He decided, then, to go on home and let them conclude for themselves where Helen Sayles might be. But Lin Jackson grabbed his arm.

"What's the gag?" he demanded stubbornly. "Do you really know anything about her, Dan?"

The tall pilot ground out his cigarette upon a tray. "Can't you see it?" he retorted, and then paused in quiet laughter for an instant. "Well, if you don't, you're not much dumb! All in God's world she's after is to work up the proper atmosphere, to get you guys on edge—so when she does blow in, she'll grab the next four days in the headlines. She's probably circling around over a key somewhere southwest of here, waiting until she's about out of gas and you're worked up sufficiently—and when she gets here, she'll have a story about getting lost and how frightened—oh, how frightened!—she was. And it'll be just so much hokum. She'll get in here before dark, or I'm a mule. And you birds will swallow it and ask for more!"

"She seems to command your admiration!" Jackson said sarcastically. "Well, I think you're wrong."

GREGORY yawned. Flying at altitude always made him sleepy, and he had come across today at almost ten thousand feet.

"I have nothing against this dame," he declared. "But I hate grandstanders, whether they're men or women—and most of all I hate these putteed boys and girls who are forever trying to cash in by imitating the real thing. But you go

ahead and wait. I'm going home. I hope she keeps you here till midnight."

He went out and got into his car and started down the drive. But when leaving the field, he remembered that his radio operator had that afternoon reported a peculiarity of the plane's transmitter; and since Gregory was something of a radio enthusiast himself, he stopped now and turned back to speak to Melvin, operator-in-charge at the home station. His was an inquiring mind; he wanted to know now if the trouble had been caused by a "dead-spot"—of which there are many—or by the set itself.

So it came about that he was in the station at the instant when the flash came in. He did not understand fully at that time what the signals meant, but he could tell from Melvin's ruddy face that it was startling. The operator, on instructions from the operations office, had been standing by for Helen Sayles all afternoon, but no word from her had come; and he had paused to listen to Dan Gregory's description of the trouble Dan had come here to relate.

Before Melvin could reply to Gregory's inquiry, he heard the sound, held up his hand in a quick, arresting movement that commanded silence. Gregory watched while Melvin deftly tuned. The operator's hands leaped to the direction-finder loop control upon his desk. He swung this slowly, rotated it almost fifty degrees at first, and then swung it back and forth through an arc of two or three degrees, and finally narrowed it to less than a degree.



Urgently, at last, he whirled to his typewriter and began putting down the message; and Dan Gregory, with bated breath, forgetting all the things he had just said of Helen Sayles, looked over his shoulder at the words which grew upon the paper:

CQ CQ CQ HS HS HS LANDING ON  
ISLAND POSITION UNKNOWN TAKE  
BEARING DETAILS LATER AR

"What the devil!" Gregory exclaimed, while Melvin, when the code had stopped, sat tense at his machine ready to take more.

Then in a flash it came, a message that sent a prickle of excitement coursing up the pilot's spine, that for a moment made the hair on the back of his scalp rise with a quick surge of alarm. He had no use for spectacular flights, but here was a human being in distress. He wondered where Helen Sayles had landed, how she had got off a course as easy as is the one from Havana to Miami. He glanced at Melvin, taking down the words with taut efficiency, and then followed the meaning of the words themselves:

SOS SOS SOS HS HS HS ATTACKED—

A break came, an instant of silence. The code sputtered through the loud-speaker once more, seeming to jar the very room.

—BY P—

And that was all. The room seemed electrified, and the silence in it almost hurt the eardrums. Melvin strained to catch the continuation of the message; but when, after ten minutes, no message came, he began calling the Kingston operator. A spatter of fast code came in, and then the dots and dashes spilled back and forth across the ether.

JUST RCD SAYLES DSTRS MSG—TIME  
1848—BEARING 130°—U GET ANY  
OF IT?

The Kingston operator came back:  
BEARING HERE ZERO—RCD MOST MSG  
—POSITION SOUTH NASSAU—DON'T  
UNDERSTAND THAT

Melvin returned:

MAY BE ANDROS ISLAND. CHECK  
POSITION

"O.K.," the Kingston operator answered; and Melvin, with the two bearings written on a slip of paper, stepped to his chart of the West Indies. By intersection of the two bearing-lines he

quickly determined the point from which the message had been sent. And when this had been done,—when, with his pencil, he had made a heavy dot upon the chart indicating where Helen Sayles had landed,—he looked up with a puzzled frown, eyes puckered, at Dan Gregory standing there.

"Something damn' peculiar here," he said in a low tone. "I don't make this out at all."

"What's up?" Dan Gregory queried. "Where'd she land? But that isn't the important thing, Melvin. She said she was attacked! What the devil could attack her on an island in the West Indies? Man, Lin Jackson will get a story out of this!"

Melvin was scooping up his chart and papers. He hesitated for an instant, and pointed to the map.

"There's no land there!" he snapped. "She couldn't have been landing where she said she was—where there isn't any land. And as to the attack, well,"—he shrugged, and made an empty gesture with his hand,—“if it's going to kill her, she's already dead by now.” He leaped again to his key, called Kingston and instructed:

VERIFY BEARING, NO LAND INDICATED  
ON CHART AT POINT WHERE PLANE  
SENT MSG

Almost instantly Kingston checked the original figures as correct:

PLOTTED POSITION, RECHECK—NO  
LAND INDICATED MY CHART WHERE  
MSG SENT—NEAREST LAND ANDROS  
ISLAND—SIXTY-EIGHT MILES PERIOD  
CAN'T FIGURE HER BEING ATTACKED  
BY ANYTHING

THERE was some further argument between the operators, while Gregory, doubt and mystery and the desire for haste filling him, carefully studied the chart. He had watched Melvin take radio bearings and plot planes' positions many times. Day after day, upon his run, he used this radio direction-finder rather than resort to celestial navigation on the long water-hops that he was called upon to make. And never once had the accuracy of the system been in doubt. When Melvin, and Gorman in Kingston, took a bearing on a plane in flight, the pilot of that plane knew he could depend, within a mile, on his location as they gave it to him.

So he dismissed the first thought

which came to him—the one of error. There was no error. Yet how, he wondered, while he watched Melvin hastily check the figures and the plotted position, could Helen Sayles have landed upon an island which did not exist? What had attacked her or her plane so suddenly that her radio had proved useless, that she had been unable to complete her message of distress? Had she landed, and been the victim of some savage while still sitting in the cockpit of the plane? There was mystery here, too deep to solve by mere deduction; for there was nothing to deduce from what he knew.

## CHAPTER II

"COME on," he urged Melvin. "This is a problem for Dunbar." Dunbar was the MYCABA operations manager. "If we're going to do anything about it, we'd better step. A plane can't get out of here tonight; but the first thing in the morning—"

Melvin, silent in contemplation of these swift facts in his possession, rolled his chart and took the typed message from the machine. In Gregory's car they raced back to the massive administration building, and rushed in.

But inside, they slowed their pace and attempted to assume a casual air. "Careful of the reporters," Gregory cautioned. "Dunbar will want this before they get hold of it, because he may not want to give them all of it. . . . They'll gang us if they get an idea we've discovered something."

They passed through the outer waiting-room almost, they thought, unnoticed. But not entirely. Lin Jackson, still loitering unwillingly for Helen Sayles' arrival, perceived in Gregory's expression that something had come up. Unobtrusively he detached himself from his companions and hastened after the two as they walked through the building toward the operations office. He came up with them as they were almost to the door, and grabbed Gregory's arm and almost spun him on his feet.

"What's the dope?" he urged imperatively. "What's happened? I know there's something—I can see it in your face!"

Gregory glanced at the others, yards away across the room, still talking desultorily about the missing woman.



Helen Sayles

"You want a scoop, Lin?" he queried quickly.

Impatiently Jackson had been studying each of them in turn. "Ask a reporter if he wants a scoop!" he scorned. "Come on with it!"

"Come in," Gregory said. "I don't know whether you'll get anything, but maybe Dunbar will let you stay. Lin, this may be the biggest story of the century—the greatest yarn you'll ever hear. And we don't know the beginning of it, yet!"

They found Dunbar at his desk, preparing to leave for the day; and Melvin blurted what had taken place within the last half-hour. The operations manager was a middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair, a stern, almost austere man who had a reputation both as an executive and as a pilot. He was, in the vernacular, a "hard-boiled guy," but pilots liked him because he understood their problems.

Dunbar listened acutely, in utter silence and in a kind of hypnotized repose, until Melvin reached the ending of his information; and then Dunbar glanced askance at Jackson, standing there inside the door. He knew the reporter casually; he trusted him, or Jackson never would have been permitted in the room. And now, evidently, Dunbar decided not to exclude the other from the developments to come.

"That's a strange ending for the Sayles flight," he admitted, sitting back in relaxation. "Melvin, are you positive of this? Positive there's no mistake



in bearing, and in plotting the position? This seems—well, improbable. What is the position of the island?"

"Just 76° 50" west; 23° 5" north—and it's entirely accurate, sir," Melvin persisted. "There can't be a mistake, Mr. Dunbar. Mr. Gregory stood right there and watched me tune the signals in, watched me take the bearing."

DUNBAR drummed his fingers on his desk-top nervously, in an apparent uncertainty which, for him, was altogether foreign. He had the reputation for being a decisive, almost a cold-blooded man in weighing information and coming to decisions. At last he looked up quizzically into the pilot's eyes.

"Gregory," he said, weighing his words carefully, "if this is real—if this isn't something hatched up to make a hoax, it will be the greatest stroke of publicity MYCABA ever fell into. The earthquake of Managua and the hurricane of Belize are paltry in comparison." He paused, and his shoulders straightened, and his face assumed, as he sat forward suddenly, a look of hard decision. "You got in this evening, didn't you?"

"Yes sir," Dan Gregory replied. "Yes, I've three days off. . . . I thought at first, when the woman didn't come in on time, that she'd gone off her course somewhere and was waiting until everybody thought she'd got lost and was upset, before she came in. But this doesn't look like that, to me. I think something should be done."

Dunbar passed his eyes from Melvin to Gregory, and then in turn to Jackson. "Good. You'll leave here at daylight with a Sikorsky, and go down there. Take Melvin and a good mechanic." He swung to study Lin Jackson more carefully than he had in that one cursory estimation. The reporter met his eyes, and held them.

"Jackson," Dunbar went on tersely, "if you can do justice to this air-line with the newspapers,—really give us a break in national publicity,—I'll offer you the opportunity to go along."

Jackson whistled softly. The thing clearly was beyond his wildest expectations. "I'll give you a million dollars' worth of space!" he promised fervidly. "Just take me on!"

"You're on. . . . Now, Gregory, I'll arrange some details of this thing. Say nothing to anyone about it—do all of you understand that thoroughly?"

"But I've got to write the story," Jackson cut in impetuously. "I thought that—"

"I know. But in this scoop, be as indefinite as you can. Give out no bearings or position of the island. Just announce that our radio picked up a distress message this afternoon after the woman was overdue here. You can add that MYCABA is sending a relief plane in the morning to an unnamed island where it is thought Helen Sayles has landed. Make it a good story, but don't say anything. You should be able to make an Associated Press flash out of it. Play it up as much as you can, and add, if you want to, that you are going on the expedition to look for the woman. Now—"

"But Mr. Dunbar, why hold back?" Jackson blurted. "This is big news; and with so much to shoot, I can't see why you want to curb me and—"

Dunbar's manner changed instantly, and his face became austere. "Your first job, Jackson, is to play ball with MYCABA. There are good and sufficient reasons for my instructions, and you'll learn them in due time. But if you want to go with Gregory, you do what I tell you."

"But news like this—"

"I don't give a damn' what kind of news it is; I told you what to say! Now you say that, and nothing more, or you'll never get another story from this line. Am I entirely clear?"

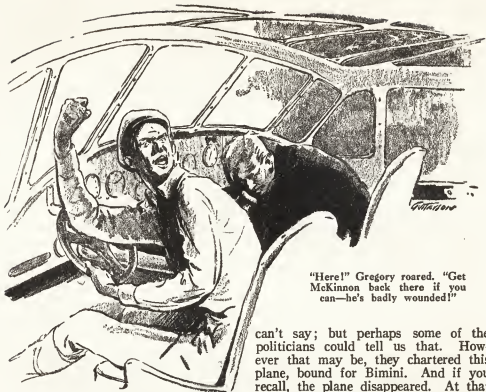
"Entirely, sir," Lin Jackson said almost in a whisper.

"Melvin," Dunbar went ahead, "get yourself a radio mechanic and check over the equipment of the plane that's going out. There'll be long press messages for you to send."

For an interval, silence held the room, while Dunbar appeared to consider other details which must be taken care of; and then at last he dismissed Jackson and Melvin almost curtly, and said to the big pilot standing by his desk:

"Sit down, Gregory. There's something else—the main thing, now—that I want to talk with you about."

GREGORY took a seat, wishing this conference would end, so he could make preparations for the flight. But Dunbar's sudden clash with Jackson had left an imprint on the pilot's mind as nothing ever had in his relation with the operations manager; he had never had an opportunity to see his superior in a position like this present one.



"Here!" Gregory roared. "Get McKinnon back there if you can—he's badly wounded!"

"This fits well," Dunbar went on, "with a theory I've held secretly for some weeks. I think there is an island down there somewhere, an island no one knows of, a new island, perhaps only recently appeared—within the last year or so. Geologically, it is entirely possible; it could happen in that locality, just as it has happened in the past, especially in volcanic areas of the Pacific, many times before; other islands have poked up through the sea and then, years later, disappeared. I think that's what's happened here."

Gregory considered this. He was no geologist, although he read widely, and had seen articles for laymen on subjects of that kind. "I don't exactly understand," he said.

"Only this," Dunbar went on crisply: "If you remember, about a year ago a pilot who operated for Causeway Charters, from the causeway base between Miami and Miami Beach, took off with five men—five men, all of whom were under criminal indictment, all under bond, and at liberty awaiting trial. One, if not two of them, had been indicted for first-degree murder. There were three prohibition offenders, men held for conspiracy. The fifth was charged with blackmail. How they obtained bond I

can't say; but perhaps some of the politicians could tell us that. However that may be, they chartered this plane, bound for Bimini. And if you recall, the plane disappeared. At that time there was no storm. Furthermore, the plane was equipped with radio. Now, the question, unanswered all that time, is—where did that airplane go? How could it simply drop from sight like that, off the very face of the earth?"

He paused again, still holding the pilot's eyes with his penetrating gaze; and then went on without waiting for an answer.

"That isn't all. A month ago three other men, all at liberty on bond for various felonies—this may have been six weeks ago, or perhaps a little longer—took off with another pilot from Causeway Charters. They dropped out of sight, disappeared, were never heard from by any living soul—that we know of. What could be the solution of those cases?"

He gave Gregory time to answer now, but the pilot could find no coherent thought to put to words. He remembered the cases of which Dunbar spoke; he had, for days on end, followed the stories in the daily press; but no suggestion of anything but the loss of the planes at sea, until this moment, had crossed his mind. And even now, with Dunbar's pointed thrusts stimulating his imagination, he could conjure no vision of a lost, or hidden, island such as the operations manager had suggested.

But for that matter, he was not of the imaginative type of mind. He was a man of fact, of figures, of determined action. Curious, yet not fanciful. And he almost blurted: "I think such a thing is too wild even to consider, Mr. Dunbar." He thought that. Sitting there, he tried to recall the names of the pilots who had been involved, but could not. Yet he could not imagine any pilot becoming mixed up with a crowd of men like that, and going with them to virtual exile on some unknown spit of sand.

He thought it was too wild to consider seriously, but he refrained from saying so. He returned to Dunbar: "It doesn't seem possible. It doesn't seem reasonable that an island could exist down there and remain undiscovered very long. But even if there is one, I don't quite see why it is of great importance in connection with an expedition to look for Helen Sayles."

"You don't see?" Dunbar cried. "Don't be entirely blind! It means that those men are on that island! Killers, criminals, perhaps. It explains the unfinished portion of the Sayles message: '*Attacked by p—*'." He picked up the incompleted radio message—blank and wagged his finger vigorously at the black-typed words. "She thought, perhaps, that they were pirates. She probably had just landed, and they rushed her before she could finish the word. It means, Gregory, that you'll have a fight on your hands before you get away from there! Can't you see that—can't you understand that, now?"

### CHAPTER III

GREGORY was silent, thinking of this possibility. He tried to visualize the low coast of a tropical island, tried to see in his mind what sort of place it was that Dunbar had suggested. How, he wondered, could the operations manager be right? How could an island, unknown and so remote that it would escape discovery throughout the years, exist? It seemed incredible.

Dunbar surmised his doubts. "Of course," he admitted, "I don't *know* that this is true. But those eight men, and the two pilots, had to go somewhere. They weren't lost at sea, or some wreckage would have undoubtedly been picked up by this time and identified." He unrolled the chart that Melvin had brought over to his office; Gregory stepped to

his side and they looked down at the penciled cross-mark indicating the position from which Helen Sayles' messages had come. It was in the shallow area, almost midway between Great Exuma Island and the southeastern tip of Andros, perhaps a hundred miles from Cayo Guajaba, Cuba. Measuring it, they found it two hundred and eighty miles from Miami, three hundred and forty from Kingston, due east of that shoal area called "Hurricane Flats," and which, incidentally, is quite correctly named.

THE chart, the latest available from the U. S. Hydrographic Office, showed no land in that immediate vicinity. No ocean traffic lanes cut through that sector of the sea; it was deserted, worthless to shipping because of numerous shoals and submerged coral reefs. The chart showed the mean depth to be about two fathoms, but at intervals the bottom shoaled upward to a quarter of a fathom, or to the surface at low tide.

"Almost three hundred miles from here," Dunbar went on, measuring the distance. "Almost any seaplane carries enough gas to reach it easily. I'm betting, Gregory, that your criminals are there."

"My criminals?" the pilot smiled. "Perhaps I'd better take along a Tommy gun and an Army .45. If they're there, they won't let me get away without a fight."

"That's just the point," the operations manager declared, lighting a heavy-smelling Cuban cigarette. "We don't want a fight with them. You just—"

"What about the girl?" Gregory interrupted. "I can't get to her without announcing myself to everybody on the island. If they want to fight, what else can I do?"

Dunbar drummed his fingers on his desk in indecision. "You just get down there and look the situation over from a distance and make sure who's there. Again I repeat, I may be entirely wrong. Maybe some animal did attack the girl. You look around. If it seems safe to do so, land and go ashore; but if you see signs of settlement, or beached airplanes, or anything that looks suspicious, don't try it. In that case, go back to the nearest of the Bahamas—Nassau would be the best place, because of the facilities we have there already, and because it's almost as close as Cuba—and radio me a full report of what you've found. If these men are there, several

Federal marshals will be glad to know it, and they'll come down with force and wipe up the place for good."

"But this Sayles woman?" Gregory repeated. "She says she was attacked by something. If men are there, men must have attacked her: she must be in danger now, and will be until we reach her. She complicates the situation—if she's in trouble, I can't go off and leave her!"

"You carry out instructions," Dunbar said, not harshly but with determination. "If she's with the gang I think is there, whatever is going to happen to her has already happened. It won't hurt her any more than she's already hurt to have to wait a day. And this may be big game. We can't get sentimental. These men are criminals, whether they're on this particular island or somewhere else. You'd sign your death-warrant if you jumped into a fight with them, so don't think of it. Be slow to act, and be careful. You'll have to use your own judgment; you'll be on the ground and can tell what's best easier than I can at this distance. Above all, use your head. Forget the girl for the time being; she'll simply have to trust her luck until we're in the right position to get to her."

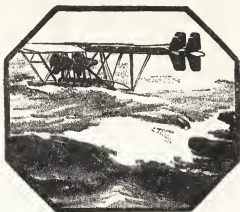
"If she isn't already dead," the pilot answered soberly; and then added in disgust: "She must be a fool to have wandered down there in the first place!"

Dunbar nodded absently. "Don't mention this to anyone. We're the only ones who know about it—Jackson, Melvin and Gorman and myself are the only ones who know the island's there. If I'm right, when you send word back, I'll get word to the authorities. And if I'm wrong, we won't have anybody laughing at us, and that—"

A KNOCK sounded at the door, and Gregory went to answer it. Three reporters, curious about Lin Jackson's continued absence and over-wearied by the wait for Helen Sayles, had come to ask if there was any information of her whereabouts. The pilot requested them to wait, closed the door and turned to Dunbar.

"How much shall I tell them? They'll learn about it any minute, when the Herald's extra hits the streets, and they'll all be down on us for holding out on them."

"Tell them we have a report, unconfirmed as yet, that Helen Sayles is down on an island in the West Indies. Tell



them I'll see them all as soon as possible."

Gregory did this, and then plunged into the mass of detail which must be taken care of. But Dunbar waved him away.

"I haven't time for that. You select your own mechanic—somebody you have every confidence in—a good fighter. I'll call the shop and order a Sikorsky checked over. You have blanket authority. Get everything in shape to go, and I'll meet you here at eight o'clock to-night for a final outline of our plans." He pushed back his chair, in evidence that the conference had ended. "Tell those reporters to come in," he added, and got up and walked silently to the open window of his office and stood there in thoughtful meditation while the pilot carried out this last command.

Dan Gregory considered carefully the mechanics with whom he had become acquainted during three years as a MYCABA pilot, and decided upon Joe McKinnon.

Yet he did not at once go to the mechanic and announce that he was to start, at dawn or as soon thereafter as was possible, upon a hazardous undertaking. The weight of responsibility somewhat frightened him; he might select a man, he thought uneasily, and send that man to injury or death. It was hardly fair to approach the matter in that way. He found McKinnon in the shops, cleaning up before departing for the day; and he called the mechanic outside and explained the matter briefly.

"This thing may be dangerous," he said, after the preliminary details had been finished. "I'd like for you to go, if you feel like it. But it's entirely up to you. Think it over carefully before making up your mind."

McKinnon was a big man, taller than the pilot by two inches, heavier by a dozen pounds. He had a florid complexion and sandy, reddish hair. He laughed, a booming, hearty explosion of real mirth, at the caution of Dan Gregory's words.

"I eat danger!" he exclaimed, without the slightest trace of boasting. "Hell's bells, you didn't have to think twice to know I'd give my left leg to go with you, did you?" He slapped his beefy thigh excitedly. "Give me the chance! Gorillas, are they? Well, we'll make 'em climb their trees!"

THE pilot smiled. McKinnon's confidence was heartening. But he said: "We may have to hunt some trees ourselves. But this ought to be a kick, at that. I'm going to turn over the servicing of the Duck to you. We'll want seven five-gallon tins of gas—extra, for this silly dame to use if she insists on flying back here when we find her. . . . If she's in such shape that she can fly. . . . Extra oil, of course. Water and food to last a week—in case Mr. Dunbar's wrong, and there's no one on the island but the girl. You take care of those things, will you? We'll shove off early in the morning, so you'd better get them done tonight."

"That I will," McKinnon promised. "Damn!"

There were so many details to be thought of, so many items to procure, that Gregory's mind was in confusion as he went back from the hangar to the radio station. But when he arrived there, he had cleared away the fringes of excitement from his racing thoughts, was planning carefully. There must be gasoline enough to take him to the island and then on to Nassau, with a reserve sufficient for headwinds he might encounter. He glanced speculatively at the sky, estimating the condition of the weather on the morrow. The month was August, and the southeast tradewinds had held steadily for weeks on end.

Melvin, when Gregory reached the radio shack, had checked again with the Kingston operator and had confirmed for the third time the accuracy of the bearings taken on the messages from Helen Sayles.

"Gorman got the position to half a degree," Melvin said. "He says he can't be wrong. I took it upon myself to tell him to keep the whole affair under his hat until Mr. Dunbar orders it released."

"That's right," Gregory declared. "I came over here to tell you. I wonder how many were listening in on that conversation when it happened?"

"Not many, at this time of day. We're operating on a foreign band—our frequency is too high for a good many 'ham' operators to tune in on it. And anyhow, it takes a darned good operator to catch code as fast as Gorman and I work it. I just thought it was better not to have Gorman running wild in Kingston with this yarn."

"Right. . . . Since all this started, I've wondered how it happened that Sayles' plane had a radio transmitter? She didn't send messages before she got in trouble—you didn't hear her, anyhow. There are a lot of things I don't understand about this business."

"The radio she had," Melvin informed him, "was a two-tube transmitter a new manufacturer promoted her into letting him install. She knew the code—I understand she used it in England when she belonged to some amateur aeronautical society. She got a thousand bucks for letting him install the set—publicity and advertising for his stuff, of course. But why she didn't send out a request for bearings before she got completely lost is a mystery to me."

There were, Gregory considered, many angles which would bear scrutiny, but time denied attention to them now. He talked with Melvin at some length, instructed the operator to check the entire radio equipment of the plane that was to be used in the morning, and then hastened into town.

## CHAPTER IV

A FRIEND of Gregory's, a former gun-runner for Cuban revolutionaries, owned a sub-machine-gun; and Gregory drove now to see this man. After some argument and persuasion, yet without disclosing entirely his reason for requiring the weapon, he got it and a supply of ammunition. At last, long after dark, he drove back once more to the field for his appointment with the operations manager. Lin Jackson's extras were by this time being hawked upon the streets by blatant newsboys, and the pilot bought one, glanced at the screaming banner head, and saved the paper for careful reading later on.

Dunbar had made a list of things which should be taken in the plane,

but almost without exception Gregory had thought of everything; so there was little of this nature which they needed to discuss.

**B**UT the operations manager seemed now somewhat uncertain of the best course of procedure. He had, he explained, withheld the salient facts from the reporters he had met and talked with earlier; and his reason for this was that the entire hope of success, in case his theory of the island should become a proven fact, lay in strict secrecy.

"A group of men couldn't live down there without connections with the mainland here, or in Cuba," he said. "Radio is one means, of course. They probably have some sort of boat service, and perhaps continue to use the planes in which they went down there. I simply told the reporters that Jackson printed all the story that we knew—that Helen Sayles was down upon an island somewhere northwest of the eastern tip of Cuba, and that MYCABA was sending a plane in search of her. Nothing about the failure of charts to show the island. Nothing, quite naturally, about my theory. That would seem too much like a figment of my own imagination." He paused, and tapped with a pencil on his glass desk top. "Somehow, Gregory, I'm afraid of this. . . . I can't understand it myself—I can't begin to tell you why. I just seem to have a hunch or something—that you'll run into trouble."

The pilot laughed. For him, after once settling the matter in his mind, there was no looking back. He was not bothered with imagination of a destructive kind; not bothered, in fact, with much at all. He was a man for fact and action; and since there was no basis in fact for the presumption Dunbar had made about the presence of dangerous men upon the island, he had almost ceased to think of it, although he, and the men who would go with him, were amply prepared.

"I'm all set," he declared. "You don't need to worry about it. I'll use good judgment, and not start something I can't finish. I'll check back to you by radio and make a full report of what we find. But don't worry about us if you don't hear for a day or two, or even three. It may not be wise or possible to transmit in the vicinity of the island—may be a dead-spot there which we can't break through. If there is a convenient place where I can make a base, I'll operate

from there for two or three days before going back to Nassau—just long enough to get what facts I can, if there are any there to get. The island may be bare, of course." He smiled, at that, watching Dunbar's nervous eyes. "If you shouldn't hear from us within a week, then get excited and send the Navy out!"

He got up, for there was nothing more that he could think of that required the attention of the operations manager. And Dunbar, still a little tense and nervous, rose too, held out his hand and said:

"I almost hope you don't find anything at all. That is, nothing but a badly scared and hungry British female subject who needs bringing back to civilization. But that hunch bothers me, I tell you! . . . Anyhow," he finished, waving uneasiness aside and gripping Gregory's hand, "good luck, old man!"

The crew for that expedition were at the field at dawn the next morning, loading the Sikorsky. But one delay after another held them up. They decided they did not have sufficient ammunition, and sent to town for more. They checked in the extra gasoline and oil, mooring lines and life-saving equipment—including a life-raft and a pair of paddles. Then, at last, just after noon, Gregory took off and climbed into the blue south-east.

The four of them, himself and Lin Jackson, Melvin and McKinnon, all had passed that crest of excitement which upsets the nerves and equilibrium; they were a sober quartette now, looking forward steadily to any eventuality which might arise. Each man's mind was filled with the conjectures of the adventure he was going on, weighing the elements of mystery, considering the known facts and building up a mental picture of the white sand of a strange West Indian island, somewhere ahead, which had pushed up through the surface of the sea.

**O**F the reality of the island there was now no least doubt. Radio compass bearings, when taken properly, are accurate—amazingly so. There had been some argument as to the possibility that Helen Sayles had seen nothing more tangible than a mirage and, thinking it an island, had sent her message while in a state of mind akin to or bordering on hysteria; but this was dispelled when they remembered her later call for help, and the statement of the attack. No, there was something there. In a matter only of hours they would know.



They were, Gregory thought, glancing to the rear, a thoroughly capable crew. McKinnon, in the co-pilot's seat across the cockpit aisle; Melvin, occupying the radio cubby-hole behind McKinnon. Lin Jackson, sprawled comfortably in the cabin with a typewriter set up across his knees, writing a lead for a story which he hoped would heat the press wires of the country. Even Jackson, the smallest of the four, Gregory felt confident, was capable of a hearty battle when necessity required it.

THE blue-gray of the Atlantic coastal waters shaded into bluest blue as they went on and reached the Gulf Stream. A tramp steamer, scarlet with blotches of new paint upon her rusty hull, wallowed under them toward the Straits of Florida while gulls, infinitely small from this higher point of observation, circled slowly against the silver background of her wake. The sky unfolded, and the low shore of the Florida peninsula slipped down behind and blended with the sea. The skyline of Miami focused to a cluster, to a ragged patch on the horizon, to a dot that disappeared.

The Sikorsky, known by those familiar with it as the "Duck," cruised easily at a hundred and ten miles an hour through the serene air. The two Wasps growled steadily at their tasks, held to perfect synchronization by their throttle settings. Gregory, after thirty minutes, when

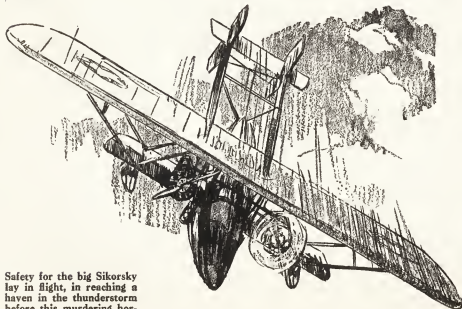
Bimini was a low dark spot far to the left upon the sea, turned around to Melvin and nodded; and the radio operator, using his semi-automatic key, flashed out a series of signals to the ground stations at Miami and Kingston. He gave no call, for Dunbar had been afraid to betray the progress of the plane; the operators, working their direction-finders, knew the identity of Melvin's symbols without hearing the number of the ship.

There was a short silence, while Melvin tuned and listened carefully. Then Porter, in Miami, came back clearly:

CORRECT COURSE THREE DEGREES TO RIGHT

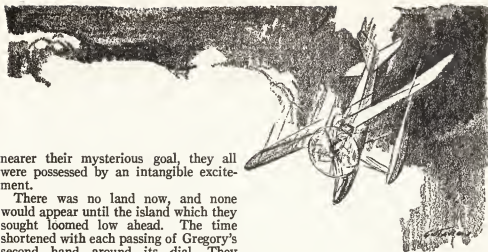
Melvin wrote this out upon a slip of paper and passed it forward to the pilot. Gregory changed his course and settled to the new reading of the compass. Then, for half an hour, he held the Duck unwaveringly.

The sea seemed endless, a dark green on which now and then a whitecap lazily appeared. But at last Andros Island, broad and flat and dull in color, appeared a little to the left. For almost an hour they skirted its curving coastal contours, dense with mangroves here and there, and then left it behind. They needed no course check now, for Andros had supplied it. Gregory went on, confidently, nerves keyed expectantly. And as the minutes passed and they drew



Safety for the big Sikorsky lay in flight, in reaching a haven in the thunderstorm before this murdering hornet could attack again.





nearer their mysterious goal, they all were possessed by an intangible excitement.

There was no land now, and none would appear until the island which they sought loomed low ahead. The time shortened with each passing of Gregory's second hand around its dial. They reached the area of shallow water, and the color of the waves changed slowly to a blue again instead of green; a deep blue first, which blended into powder blue and showed a variety of tints where occasional holes pockmarked the bottom of the sea.

All eyes, now, were straining past the bow. Lin Jackson, his typewriter forgotten for the time, came forward to the cockpit aisle and looked up through the cockpit glass. Melvin stared hard past McKinnon's burly shoulder. And McKinnon, now and then removing his binoculars from his eyes, sat calmly chewing an enormous wad of gum. Yet he betrayed his fervor by the flush upon his face.

They were too close to their destination, now, to risk a request for additional radio bearings; but none were needed. They had come two hundred and fifty miles upon the line marked out by Dunbar; they must only continue it for thirty more and the mystery of Helen Sayles would be disclosed.

"Lots of ocean!" the reporter said in Gregory's ear. "Almost enough to drown a man!"

The pilot started to reply, but McKinnon suddenly jerked down his glasses and thrust up an arm, pointing with his stubby forefinger.

"Dead ahead! Can't see much yet, but it's an island! Take a look." He passed the binoculars to Gregory, took over the controls while the pilot put the glasses to his eyes and adjusted them to focus.

A line of grayish-yellow sand appeared to Gregory's vision. It was hardly more than a thread, seeming to float level with the water. But at one end

were trees, palms, evidently; although the distance was still too great to know that positively. There was a building of some sort, almost white, that blended with the color of the island's shore.

Gregory debated for a moment, alternating his gaze between a gathering thunderstorm to the northeast, and the clump of trees which now was visible to his naked eye. There was much evidence of habitation on this spit of sand. If Helen Sayles had landed here, as she must have done, Dunbar's theory seemed substantiated.

It would undoubtedly be safer, Gregory considered soberly, to skirt the place at a distance, studying it with the binoculars, before attempting to come closer. He might, perhaps by hiding in that black tropical rain, approach quite close without detection. So, with that in view, he began a slow turn to the left, toward that heavy downpour; he gave the controls back to McKinnon, then, and scrutinized the island with the binoculars. His brow was furrowed in a puzzled frown.

HE heard, suddenly, a sound, as of a buzzsaw at a distance. Instantly the thought of engine trouble crossed his mind. Engine trouble now would prove most perilous. He looked up and back, first at the left motor, then at the right. And when his gaze was held in that position, from the corner of his eye he saw an object that seemed to hurtle down at him.

A tiny plane, with pontoons instead of wheels, leaped from the sky. Gregory heard no report of guns, but instantly

the whole pattern of the thing grew clear. He was attacked—just, perhaps, as Helen Saylcs had been attacked!

And then the hatch glass started before his upturned, frozen eyes. Some one, Melvin or Jackson, screamed in agony behind him. From the spill of his vision he saw McKinnon slump forward.

## CHAPTER V

**S**IMULTANEOUS with that first burst of fatal fire, the right engine quit cold, sputtered again once, stopped finally with a jar that shook the entire structure of the plane. The left one drummed on, but with a reduced, a subdued volume, which in itself indicated the extent of their helplessness in this desperate situation. Dan Gregory, before he did anything else, turned back a little and headed for the thunderstorm; a landing here at sea, fifteen miles from a hostile shore, would leave him at the mercy of his attacker. He could not taxi with one motor, much less take to the air again. Yet while he remained aloft, he could fly, and maneuver to a limited extent upon the power of one Wasp.

The combat plane snarled down and past and zoomed upward with an angry, penetrating scream of its propeller. But Gregory did not try to watch it. It could shoot him down at will, as witnessed by the devastation one swift attack had brought about; safety for the big Sikorsky lay in flight, in reaching a haven in the thunderstorm before this murdering hornet of the skies was able to attack again.

It seemed, however, hopeless. The thunderstorm was at least five miles away, and with one engine dead, the Duck would take four minutes to negotiate that distance. Holding his breath when he glanced upward, cursing softly, Gregory looked back to see what victim, besides McKinnon, had been struck.

The cabin was in a state of devastation. A stream of slugs from the chattering machine-guns had ripped through the upper wing and, piercing the gas tanks, torn through the top of the dural hull. In one place, down the aisle, a pathway had been drilled where one bullet followed another in a curving line that terminated, Gregory saw in helpless anger, in the supine and bloody form of Sparks Melvin. The radio operator was beyond all help, yet Lin Jackson, unhurt, was bending over him and mak-

ing frantic efforts to lift him to a seat. The reporter was smeared with blood that pulsed feebly from a hole in the back of Melvin's head.

Gregory, made savage by the sight, did not feel the sagging weight of McKinnon on the control wheel. He turned forward, looked up to see if there was to be a repetition of the murderous attack. He saw the tiny plane, still climbing almost directly over him. Then, for the first time, he realized that McKinnon was not dead. The big mechanic's body shifted; he moved, and frothy blood oozed from the corner of his mouth.

Gregory flung an oath at the circling plane, and turned to Jackson.

"Here!" he roared. "Get McKinnon back there if you can! He's badly wounded!"

Jackson attempted to obey. But he was small, a midget of a man; and McKinnon weighed two hundred pounds. Yet somehow, with Gregory helping as much as the flying of the Duck permitted, the reporter hauled the wounded man from the cockpit seat back into the cabin and put him, a lump of senseless flesh and dripping blood, into a chair.

There was a first-aid kit on the bulkhead behind the pilot, and Jackson snatched this down, tore it open, and jerked bandage rolls and disinfectants out where he could use them. Gregory, unable to help further, gave his attention to the other plane.

**I**T must, he estimated, be at least three thousand feet above him now, a mere speck in the sky that soon would hurtle down and make a last and final blow to wipe them off the earth. The thunderstorm was still three miles away. And even as he watched, the little plane rolled over on its side, upon its back, and started down.

For a moment it seemed suspended there in the perpendicular position before it grew in size. And then it changed miraculously from a dot with fins upon each side to a darting messenger of death. It grew.

Only a thousand feet above now—and its speed now must be almost three hundred miles an hour.

Gregory timed it, his fear and anger crowded from his mind by the need for accuracy in the maneuver which he hoped to do. The pilot of the plane, if he had had experience in firing on aerial targets, would delay his bursts until he came within three hundred yards. And,

remembering grimly the death that the first attack had brought, Gregory knew that his adversary was an able one. Yet the Sikorsky's only chance was in a quick turn at the last instant before the burst began. There was no hope of haven, yet, within the thunderstorm. Gregory started in a shallow dive to pick up speed, and while he dived, his eyes were on the plunging plane.

AT the last possible instant he whipped the Duck around in a quick turn to the left, throwing the dead engine up where it, instead of Jackson and McKinnon, would take the slugs when the guns began to spurt them. He came around almost in a complete circle while holding the Sikorsky in that difficult position.

He got around, while into his ears beat the snarl of the propeller of the other plane, the slap of bullets that went past his head through both sides of the hull. The engine, taking a portion of that volley, seemed suddenly like a broken thing. It lost revvs, picked them up laboriously, slowed again; until a thousand revvs was the greatest output it was able to deliver.

The thunderstorm was two short miles away now, yet it seemed to Gregory totally unattainable. The fighting ship climbed quickly, zooming two thousand feet before it leveled a little and went up steadily. The pilot of that plane, if he knew his business, would not delay so long in renewing the attack this time as he had the last. Gregory, numb with a kind of catalepsy of thought and body, calculated the length of time it would require him to reach the rain.

If, actually, he would be able to reach it now! The left motor was about to stop entirely. With two miles to go, and with two thousand feet to lose before he touched the water, he turned back and yelled to Jackson:

"Let McKinnon go! Get out a Tommy gun before that guy gets a chance to dive again! Come up here with me and we'll do the best we can to fight him off!"

The reporter seemed not to hear. He worked desperately to bind McKinnon's wounds before the big man should bleed to death.

And, seeing, the urgency of the mechanic's needs, Gregory did not repeat his order. He focused his attention on the plane above, and on the inky downpour of rain ahead.

It was not more than half a mile now, for the Duck was in a dive and was making a hundred miles an hour, aided by the crippled engine. Once inside that rain they would be safe for some few minutes. Yet the ultimate futility of the situation was easily, dreadfully, apparent. The rain, blinding now, would cease soon, leaving them stranded on the sea. With no motive power, within sight of the island, they would be entirely at the mercy of attack by air or water. And Gregory knew that the attack would come swiftly and without a tinge of mercy.

He tried to understand the reason for this ruthlessness. Why would any man, utterly without provocation, set out to kill in this cold-blooded way? But he could spend no time searching for an answer. The thing was here; death awaited him in each successive fire-burst from the pursuit ship's blazing guns. And those bursts would be upon him in an instant.

For the little plane, almost in the edge of the thunderstorm, had rolled over again and started in its dive. It drove down at heartless speed while Gregory watched it, horror-struck. Yet he did not forget his sense of timing, his estimation of the instant when the pilot of the attacking plane would squeeze down upon his triggers.

At the moment when he thought the guns would go, he kicked rudder violently, skidded almost without bank, and tried to turn away.

Bullets sliced through the wings from tip to tip as the little plane pulled up and zoomed away. The radio transmitter tubes went dark as the set was riddled by the fire. But, although communications back to Dunbar were made impossible by this, by some error of marksmanship the shots did no further damage. The engine sputtered on, threatening each instant to quit completely. Gasoline, which must have been streaming from the wing tanks since the first attack, plumed out into a trail of vapor in the rush of the air. And then, with a quarter of a mile to go, the engine did quit as the tanks went dry.

GREGORY heard the engine stop. But his emotions were too strained, too garbled, to react.

His one fixed thought was to reach the rain, and he sighed with a vast relief when at last the first great drops of water spattered on his windshield—a

windshield starred and cracked from half a dozen bullets now.

He had five hundred feet to lose, and he lost them while plunging straight into the heart of that tropical thunderstorm. A current of wild air caught the plane and bore it upward, even though it had no motive power of its own; and for thirty seconds the Duck climbed. Then, as suddenly as the gust had come, it stopped; a current smashed it down, and in a mushing glide they struck the water. It was impossible to see against that flood of rain, and Gregory only felt the impact, felt the bounce, and hauled back on his controls and waited for the final landing.

SO they got down, and, knowing the uselessness of trying to radio their base, gave attention to McKinnon. The big mechanic was shot through the right lung; a bullet had gone through each leg, and one had coursed downward and burned his shoulder-blade. The lung wound was the dangerous one.

There were many things to do in the hours before darkness. Time was pressing. They made McKinnon as comfortable as possible. They removed Melvin's body to the rear, and Gregory stood there for a long time looking down at him. At last he turned woodenly away. Anger, the emotional release of rage, was denied him in the numbing shock of what had taken place. He ceased, for an insufferable length of time, to hear, to see, to feel. The thing was too brutally colossal for his comprehension.

Lin Jackson left McKinnon and came down the bloody, perforated aisle and touched the pilot's arm. Gregory didn't know that he was there until he heard the voice; and then it seemed to come distantly, unreal.

"Dan," said the reporter. The pilot did not move, did not seem to know that he was spoken to. "Dan! There's water coming through the floor!"

Gregory freed himself from his detachment. Melvin—dead! They couldn't hurt him now. He hadn't known what hit him, hadn't felt the pain. He had gone out with the roar of guns, and hadn't heard them, hadn't seen his foe. But he was dead, and there were other things to do for those who lived. . . . The Duck was going down.

Tropical dusk was closing in, a smothering dusk that crowded in between the clouds and sea; yet Gregory could see the water spurting through the bullet

holes as soon as Jackson warned him. The airplane was going down, and they couldn't stop it. The sea here might be a fathom deep, or fifty. The island might be a mile away, or ten, for they had drifted since the landing, and no one had paid attention to the drift. But, no matter where they were, the plane was going down, and they must leave it.

"Get out the rubber raft," Gregory commanded brusquely. He was himself again; the numbness of that awful space of time was past. He was a man of action, meeting things head-on. Yet as Jackson turned aft to the luggage compartment, stepping over Melvin's body, the pilot slipped back into that former mood unwillingly. There was sudden tenderness in him, and grief and anguish. He had liked Sparks Melvin. . . .

He picked up the body gently and unfolded it in a tarpaulin. It would go down in the airplane's final plunge. He got up, blinded now by tears of rage and helplessness, and went forward to the pilot's cockpit hatch. The water was sloshing at his ankles as he moved along the aisle. He could hear Jackson, aft, cursing expertly as he struggled with the raft.

Outside the rain fell in torrents of gray water, beating on the wing with a sound as harsh as hail. The sea was lashed by a blustering, gusty wind, and danced in short and choppy swells. The Duck was down in them, and getting lower. It drifted heavily, its super-structure quivering against the blasts.

There was no visibility. Rain sizzled on the surface of the water with a frying sound. Combined with dusk and scudding clouds the wingtips were the limits, seemingly, of distance. Gregory stood there, head thrust up above the hull in the full force of the rain, and tried to place himself with relation to the island. But this was useless, and proved a waste of time. No pound of surf came to his ears, no light to his eyes. He slipped down once more, and hurriedly detached the compass from its mounting on the instrument panel in the cockpit. Navigation, on a night like this, was not a matter for the senses.

Jackson came forward, the deflated raft hugged beneath his arm.

"No bullet-holes, as far as I can tell," he said. "What's its capacity? Take us all? It won't be safe, overloaded, in this sea."

"Safe? Melvin's the only one of us who's safe."

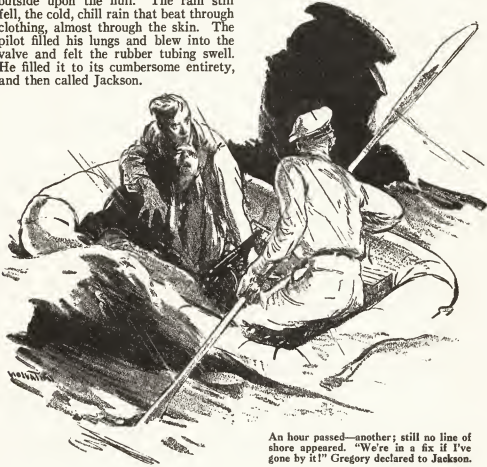
"Come on," said Jackson. "Forget it, Dan!"

"Let's have the raft," Gregory demanded woodenly. "You help McKinnon all you can. I'll blow it up, and figure out a way to launch it."

He went forward again, climbed up outside upon the hull. The rain still fell, the cold, chill rain that beat through clothing, almost through the skin. The pilot filled his lungs and blew into the valve and felt the rubber tubing swell. He filled it to its cumbersome entirety, and then called Jackson.

tered something that the pilot couldn't understand.

"So long, Melvin," Gregory said softly. "I'll be seeing you." He stooped and lifted the mechanic as gently as he could, turned and walked with that great



An hour passed—another; still no line of shore appeared. "We're in a fix if I've gone by it!" Gregory declared to Jackson.

The reporter climbed down halfway into the water and they slid the life-raft to the surface. He climbed in, and held it there against the sinking sea-plane's hull. Gregory went below. The water was knee deep now, washing back and forth across the cabin with the swinging of the plane. In the darkness the tarpaulin, enfolding its burden, was surging gently, ceaselessly. McKinnon, his sprawled legs half submerged, sat slumped where Jackson had left him in a seat. He was recovering somewhat from the smashing shock of those four bullets, although consciousness had not returned, and perhaps never would; but he groaned occasionally, and once, while Gregory stood there near him, he mut-

helpless figure, up the aisle. McKinnon groaned again, a pain-engendered sound; but the pilot gave no heed. He had difficulty even lifting the mechanic.

Outside, in the darkness and the rain, Lin Jackson helped him. They lowered the unconscious man into the rubber craft, and then once more Gregory went back to get their guns. He took an automatic for each of them, and the Tommy gun, a small quantity of food and a pocket flashlight. He left half the ammunition, because the flimsy rubber boat would not have carried it. At last, before the Duck went down forever, he got in and shoved off into the darkness.

It was an inky darkness, as if the clouds were an inkwell which had poured

its contents to the sea. The storm, while growing less intense, was spreading. Gregory, remembering time, saw that it was after seven. He looked at the compass, and placed it so its luminous lubber line was facing him and he could read the numerals on the card. He had been northwest of the island when he landed, and he picked up the two light paddles and started southeast steadily. He might have several hundred yards to row, or several miles, but he would get there, either under cover of darkness or in the daylight of the morning following. They must reach the land to remain alive.

But to what final goal? He asked himself after they had been under way ten minutes. Men who tried to kill them from the air would kill them on the ground. That was a certainty. But he tried to submerge his thoughts of this in other things. Time enough for that when he should face it. They were, while in this cockshell, still at the mercy of the sea.

#### CHAPTER VI

THEIR glimpse of the island before they were shot down had been so short and superficial that Gregory now had difficulty visualizing it. It was long and narrow, he remembered, and there seemed to be only one settlement upon it, at its southern end. Therefore the wisest action was to set out for the northern tip, get Jackson and McKinnon on dry land as soon as possible, and strike out alone in exploration of the place.

His single purpose now was to obtain a boat capable of taking them to Nassau. Helen Sayles, no matter what her danger here, must remain, at least until a larger party might be recruited to come back to help her. Gregory, single-handed, would be helpless. And he would be single-handed, because McKinnon would require Jackson's constant presence and attention while he lived. Even if he died, releasing Jackson, two men could not cope with the killers who resided here.

When he thought of Helen Sayles, his mind still stunned from seeing murder done so ruthlessly, he cursed her dully.

"Why didn't she fall in the drink and save us all this trouble?" he exclaimed, and hated her for what she stood for in his eyes. Then he forgot her.

They had launched the raft on the lee side of the sinking airplane, and in pushing off into the night, had escaped the fury of the boiling sea. But now, as Gregory paddled cautiously away, the wind and water leaped at them, and the boat became a dancing, crazy thing.

"Watch it!" Jackson shouted apprehensively. "We're going under, sure as hell!" His voice, three feet away in the shapeless bow, was muffled by the rush of waves.

"I'm watching it. How's McKinnon doing?" He could not see them clearly. Jackson crouched there with the wounded man's head and shoulders on his knees. It was not the best position, but the mechanic was too tall to lie prone in the bottom of the craft. "We shipping any water?"

"Plenty! You'll have to stop and bail, but don't stop now. Can you tell where you're going? McKinnon's just the same."

"Only our general direction," Gregory said. "But we'll make it. Try to keep McKinnon dry." There was no use to try to talk. The words were whipped away. The boat pitched and swung, and he fought it with his paddle. He knew his course, but could not hold it. The life-raft had no keel, and each time it rode into a wave it seemed to poise upon the top and hesitate, and turn stubbornly and slide down into the trough, heading up once more with an error of from five to forty-five degrees. Gregory fought, and cursed at weariness, at the graybeards, at the rain.

The rain still fell, sometimes in gusts, sometimes in a steady drizzle that blocked out whatever visibility there might otherwise have been. In the lulls, when the sizzle of the drops had ceased, the night was not so dark, and he could see the outline of the clouds that raced low above the water, flying with a gale-strength upper wind. Yet, strangely, there was no gale upon the surface of the sea. The wind was only strong enough to kick up choppy waves.

IN a period of downpour, Gregory snapped his flashlight for an instant upon Jackson, and flicked it down to the unconscious man. The reporter's face was gray and tense and cold. McKinnon's was the shade of death.

"Keep fighting 'em, Lin," the pilot said. He knew that wasn't necessary but conversation helped somehow. It made him forget the ceaseless paddling.



And Jackson, raising his voice to meet the other's mood, returned: "You do that, Dan. I'm not bad off; I'm resting, here!"

It was by the wind that Gregory could judge his way most accurately. The compass helped, but it was unsteady from the jolting of the boat, and oscillated sometimes violently. At those times he looked away from it, felt the wind on his wet face, and judged direction thus.

**B**UT time was slow, measureless, and agonizing. An hour passed, grew into another, and still no line of shore appeared ahead. The rain still fell. There was no change in the surface of the sea. The change only was in Gregory. His weary body had become oblivious to the pain of near-exhaustion, and he worked mechanically. His thoughts were elsewhere, wandering, trying to see ahead, and looking back when he wasn't careful to avoid it. He reviewed the day, and yesterday. He saw the four of them as they had been this morning, a carefree lot, tingling to the stimulation of adventure they were starting on. Danger? They had scoffed at it, yet Gregory knew now that he had had a sensing of this thing, this danger that had run them down. It had been remote, intangible, as hazard in the offing always seems. How different now!

Gregory's brain was weary, like his body, but it would not give him pause.

Again, as he had done yesterday when the first whisperings of a hidden island had been spoken following the reception of the message from Helen Sayles, he tried to penetrate the mystery which surrounded this spot of silence in the sea. How could an island the size of this one, at least a half mile wide and two miles long, remain undiscovered through the years since Columbus had set foot in the West Indies? It seemed impossible that such a thing could be. And if logic rejected such a possibility, how, then, was a new island made upon this world? The Atlantic coast was sinking, true enough, and at some distant future time all Florida, perhaps, would become again an ocean floor. Geologists knew the proof of that, but it might take a million years, or fifty million. Not weeks, or months, or single years, as this undiscovered island had appeared to take in forming. How, and when, and why?

"Forget it!" he muttered. "You'll go crazy trying to find the answer! Where's the wind?"

He did forget it, and looked sightlessly ahead into the dark, but found no hint of land.

"We're in a fix if I've gone by it!" he declared to Jackson, sitting silent there. "I'd swear I knew which way to go, but we've been out two hours, now, and should have been there!"

"With a headwind, in this eggshell?" Jackson answered, querying the point. "All there is to do is keep on going. If you stop, you'll drift away. But at that, you'd better stop awhile and bail."

A long wave, phosphorescent at its foamy crest, bore down upon them. They were in the trough when Gregory saw it coming, and he braced himself and drove his paddle deep into the swirling water to hold the lifeboat steady for the impact. They seemed hurled upward upon that upflung bosom of black sea, and rode it out and poised, suspended there a moment. A drive of the paddle and they started down, sliding, slithering sidewise as they went. They raced into the bottom of the trough.

There came a sudden slowing, almost as from a blow. The motion of the boat was interrupted, and a dull, slow sound came up to them from at their feet. Before Gregory could interpret it, water covered him almost to his thighs. His knee struck something hard and sharp, and with the beginning of that pain he knew that they had gone aground. The rubber bottom of the boat was gone, sliced from stem to stern, and water surged up about them.

"Here!" Jackson shouted in sudden realization. "Dan! McKinnon's going to drown!"

**G**REGORY struggled forward; his feet slipped through the slice in the bottom of the craft, and he went to shoulder depth before he found the bottom. A wave came tumbling down upon him while in that position, lifted the disabled craft and dragged him with it. His head and shoulders were buried for a moment in the froth and fury of that angry comber, and he fought desperately to clutch one side of the boat and keep from going with it. He came up strangling, retching from the salt water he had sucked into his lungs, and tried to see, to find Jackson and McKinnon there.

"Where?" he shouted. His voice broke and he strangled in the effort. Something brushed across his shoulders, and he grabbed for it. Jackson's wildly flailing arm was clamped around his



neck, and Jackson's straining voice was crying in his ear:

"McKinnon! McKinnon! I'm going to lose him, Dan! I've got him by the hair!" He coughed and seemed to shudder. "Quick! Before I lose my hold!"

The pilot turned as best he could, still clinging to the life-raft with one arm. He couldn't see, and there was no use wasting time in trying to see. A raking,

could not cling here for that awful length of time even if they left McKinnon to smother in the churning sea. No human being could survive for long with combers burying him at intervals of fifty seconds, battering him and trying to tear him

As Gregory started to release the boat, a harsh voice froze him. "I wouldn't, bud, if I was you!"



curling wave broke ten feet away and smothered them, and they came up together, still linked arm in arm and fighting for their lives. Jackson was all but exhausted, and there was little he could do, but somehow he helped Gregory get the wounded man between them and the boat. There, in that position, they considered what to do.

"Coral reef, that must have been," Jackson gasped, and sucked in air. "When that big wave hit us, I went right through the bottom with McKinnon!"

"Save your breath," Gregory ordered. "How you feel?"

"Shot!" the other said between quick inhalations. "Bit whipped down—I'm afraid."

Gregory felt no aching muscles now, no weariness. His racing mind did not pause to be afraid, although he knew they didn't have a chance. It would be nine hours until daylight, and perhaps longer until the ending of this storm that had started as a thunderhead. They

from the slim support the life-raft offered. The raft itself was useless now except to keep them floating, for, with bottom ripped clean through, it offered no support inside, even though the air remained imprisoned in the outer ring. They could not propel it, hanging here.

Dimly he remembered the guns and ammunition that had been in the bottom there, the food that they had meant to have for the longer dash to Nassau when they were on their way at last. Gone, of course. Even the flashlight would be gone.

Cling here, Dan Gregory's mind commanded. Hang on grimly through the hours until daylight. Let McKinnon go; the mechanic was a dead man anyhow.

Save himself, and let the ocean take the other two.

He toyed with the thought, a vague thought in the bottom of his mind. It would come to that, before the end. Before the end Jackson, with lesser strength, would grow weary and let go. A combler drove him down, and as the water stung his face he felt the reporter close to him, against him there as they fought futilely to save McKinnon from the sea.

"Hang on, Lin!" he cried, when he could speak again.

## CHAPTER VII

THEY drifted with the sea, and time was measureless. They didn't know how long it was, and then, when Gregory shifted his position and sank for a moment lower in the water, his feet scraped sand. He felt his way, and reached bottom securely with both feet, and in a lull between the seas he found the depth to be no greater than his armpits. The next wave tore him from this footing, swept him with it and then let him rest again, and this time the water came only to his waist. He walked ahead, following the wind, and emerged in water to his knees.

"Sandbar, Lin!" he exclaimed. "This region must be full of 'em. Here! Help me get McKinnon on my shoulder—drain some of the water out of him."

They were free from danger here, at least for the time being. Combers burst upon the bar, but did no damage to the men who poised there; and as Gregory stood with McKinnon hanging head down from his shoulder, as he listened to the whistle of the wind and the frying sizzle of the rain, he heard, some distance to the south, the crash of breakers bursting on a shore.

"There's our island, Lin!" he cried. "You hear that? To the south! Right where this sandbar ought to lead us if we follow it!"

They listened carefully, almost afraid to believe that it was true. But undoubtedly some land was there, for the booming of the sea was loud and distinct.

For ten minutes, holding their breath and pausing at intervals to listen for the guiding sound, they waded on. The sand spit followed a curving line. It took them, once, into water to their belts, but they went on, and climbed again until the seas between the breakers were but ankle deep. Until at last they came out upon a low and shallow beach, with flat

land dark and invisible ahead, bare and desolate, silent as the very death that it portended.

"McKinnon must be made of iron!" Jackson murmured, after they had made the wounded man as comfortable as possible. "Bullets couldn't kill him, and he wouldn't drown! Dan, we're going to pull him through! Which one of us is going looking for that boat?"

"I'll go," said Gregory. "You're safe enough right here, until daylight. No use to hunt a place to hide. I'll rest a minute, and then have a look around. If there's a colony here, there'll be some boats. Maybe there's an airplane that will carry all of us. But with this sea, we'll have to wait for daylight to shove off. I'll do well to steal the boat and get away with it, much less finding the tip of the island and getting you aboard to-night. I'll get the boat and anchor somewhere close—as close as possible. If this wind lets up, and the overcast breaks so there'll be starlight, we may get started while it's dark."

Almost spent, Jackson did not immediately reply. Gregory broke the silence once and grumbled at the soggy, worthless cigarettes he had found in a pocket of his shirt. At last he got slowly to his feet.

"Lin," he said, and his voice was grim and somber, "if I'm not back by daylight, you'd better go on in and ask for help for big Mac there. If I'm not back by then, they'll have me. . . . It was bad to lose our guns, out there."

Jackson arose. He put a hand on Gregory's shoulder, gripped it tensely. "You go easy, Dan," he said. "You be careful—don't start a fight if you haven't got a chance."

"Sure," said Gregory, and chuckled oddly. "Well, old boy, so long."

WALKING carefully, counting his steps, he progressed along the sandy shore toward the island's end on which that afternoon he had seen buildings and the green of palms. His shoes scuffed hollowly upon the sand, and seemed, in contrast to the deathly silence, to echo with the volume of their sound. The wind, now, was dying steadily. The rain stopped suddenly, ending in a gusty deluge that drummed upon the sand. The clouds, as Gregory made slow progress, broke overhead and revealed blazing southern stars in patches of clean sky. With this meager added light, he increased his speed.

He walked for perhaps a mile before he saw the first faint pinpoint of light ahead, and he knew that he had at least another mile to go before great caution was required. The men aboard this island would no doubt presume that the Sikorsky had gone down at sea, just as it had done, and that the members of its crew had died by gunfire or by drowning. They would not expect a visit such as this.

At last, several hundred yards from what seemed to be the outer fringe of settlement, he stopped to reckon distance and the program that confronted him. His brief examination of the island by binoculars had given him but little knowledge of the grouping of the buildings. He had seen nothing but the patch of white higher than the sand, and the cluster of green trees which, in this latitude, probably were palms. He knew nothing of the boat dock, if, indeed, the place possessed one.

HE went on, slowly, cautious and alert. The center of the settlement gradually took form, and assumed surprising breadth. Gregory approached closer than a hundred yards, and counted seven buildings, dull shapes against the dark.

He stopped again. There was danger in exploring blindly, so he turned inland and started stealthily across the island, hoping to emerge upon the farther beach and view the place from a new angle. There was no cove ahead, at least no pier that showed, and there might be one on the other side.

The sand was bare. No grass or other vegetation was nurtured by this sterile soil. The palms were there, but that was all, as if transplanted with the uprising of this barren strip of land. His shoes sank in the soft, damp substance, and he thought once of the trail his feet were leaving. But that didn't matter now.

He stumbled, almost fell as his toe scraped into a high place in the ground. He caught himself, went on. In the next step he tripped again; and this time, worn almost to exhaustion, fell.

Sitting there, his eyes made out the contour of the mound. He saw another, like it. Curious, and astonished at the thought that came to him, he investigated further. He found other mounds, some weathered almost level, but there were fresh ones too, and one, from the softness of the sand, from shovel marks

his exploring fingers found, that had been made that day.

"Graves!" he muttered. "Seventeen new graves in a cemetery! This last one, here, was made—for Helen Sayles!"

NUMBLY he rose. He had been in war, had seen men buried in shallow grooves scooped in the earth. He knew—there was no need for further queries of this thing. But why? These victims here were murdered, reason told him. Melvin had been murdered—and Helen Sayles. Why? This was no time or place to find the answer. Get away from here, and get McKinnon to a doctor. Time, then, to recruit a force to come back here and investigate. The thing now was escape, and speed!

Resolutely now he turned southward, skirted a group of palms and reached the beach and continued quickly, nervously, past the last building in the group. His hunting eyes picked out the dark line of a pier ahead, and he almost broke into a run. Yet he was cautious. Those mounds back there were vivid in his memory. He could sense the danger here, and the back of his scalp tingled with the feel of it. He watched to the right, alert for signs or sounds of men. But no voices reached him through the darkness. He saw nothing and heard nothing but the thudding of his shoes.

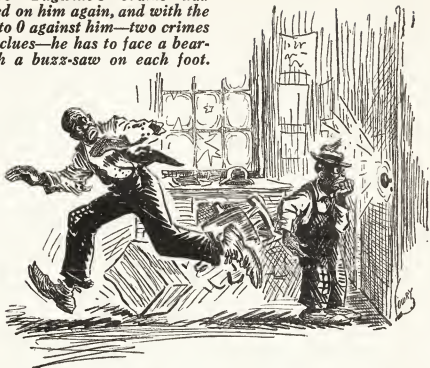
He passed the building, went on into the heavier darkness near the pier. He could see the outline of a boat, vague and shadowy, a small craft that seemed, at this distance, what he needed. He was so intent upon it that he did not look around; he forgot that he had lost his guns.

Behind him as he walked, there came a figure, keeping pace. It seemed a blot against the night, and then divided suddenly into two, one of which turned toward the large building as they came abreast of it. The other followed Gregory with a swift and easy stealth, skirting the beach and keeping well from view below the ridge of barren dunes that formed a rim around the island. Gregory, however, did not see or hear. He reached the pier, and started out upon it, slowly now, infinitely cautious against a false or noisy step. The boat was moored securely with half-inch lines, and he started to release it. A harsh, cold voice behind him froze him into stone:

"I wouldn't, bud, if I was you!"

The ensuing chapters of this thrilling serial are of even more absorbing interest—in the forthcoming May issue.

*Detective Bugwine's brains had backfired on him again, and with the score 2 to 0 against him—two crimes and no clues—he has to face a bear-cat with a buzz-saw on each foot.*



## *The Rambling Ram-Lamb*

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

BUGWINE BRECK glanced out of the window of the Columbus Collins detective-agency (for colored) and shuddered. Instinct might be pinch-hitting for intellect with this assistant-sleuth, but the woman he saw hurriedly heading for the agency door looked too much like trouble already *en route* to the spot marked X.

Her knock ended his suspense early. And Columbus, who of late had been showing a tendency to break for the back door when he did not know who was knocking, saw in time that their caller was feminine, so stayed his flight and flung open the door.

"Is dis here de big detectin' place?" she demanded belligerently.

Relief and hope mingled to make a gangling sleuth instantly effusive. "De Columbus Collins detectin' agency, yes ma'am! Wid Columbus Collins hisself, in person, speakin'. Step yourself right

in," Mr. Collins invited as he kicked the organization's soap-box elegantly from beneath his still-seated assistant.

The now-wall-eyed Bugwine didn't like such a big voice in such a small woman: back of a combination like that was generally some married man doing his own sewing. Columbus' palm stifled Mr. Breck's apprehensive squawk of protest just in time—handling domestic cases was where an assistant-sleuth too often got left locked in a cold closet all night!

"All domestic cases strictly confidential, too," the head of the agency was quoting glibly from the newest of the framed mottos on its walls. "Mr. Breck here—*whar-at dat runt?* Meet Mist' Breck, Mrs.—er—"

"Lamb. Amnesia Lamb is de name," supplied the client grimly. "From Dothan. And lookin' for one of dem rambling ram-lambs."

"Mist' Breck is head of de agency's Missin' Husbands Department," his chief further fitted the status of Bugwine to the demands of the moment. "Always gits his Lamb."

"Git dis one, and he's good."

"Aint care what name dey use, he gits 'em. Give Bugwine de name and address and whar last seen,—and a old vest or somethin' to sniff,—and he's off bayin' on de trail in no time. Dat boy's a regular human bloodhound when he's roused! What de nature of de case and complaint?"

"I done cotched up wid him—dat's his main trouble!" snorted an evidently wronged wife. "Ramblin' round amongst de women! I aims to half-kill him, too. But now I done mislaid it—"

"Mislaid what?" Mr. Collins' sympathy fed fat upon the bulge of her pocketbook. In view of Columbus' current predicament—the agency needed a cash-client quick!

"I done writ down whar-at to find him in Demopolis on a piece of paper—and *den lost de paper!*"

Mr. Collins staggered suitably. "You means," he summarized tragedy, "dat you cain't cripple your husband becaze you is done lost whar-at he is?"

"Yeah. Dat's why I needs detectives—to sniff out whar is dat low-down Huntingdon Lamb what run off two weeks ago wid part my weddin'-silver—"

"De little polecat!" Mr. Collins' indignation was professional but perfect.

"And wid dat manicure-gal in de barbershop too!" Amnesia completed the catalogue of a husband's crimes. "So I craves for you to cotch him—den jes' lemme at him—dat's all!"

"Two-legged skunks is de worst sort," purred Columbus sympathetically. "What dis one of yourn look like?"

"Looks like nothin' wid de lid loose, to me! 'Bout five-foot eight, hundred and fifty pounds; complected like a wet cigar, and hell wid de women."

Bitterness tinged the wifely tones.

"ALL right, den." Columbus began to fill his vest. "Dat ramblin' ram-lamb jest de same as cotched already! De fee's four bucks, C. O. D."

"Four bucks you gits, C. O. D. too. Meanin' cash on delivery of Huntingdon Lamb wid my hand on him. Wid four-bits extra, too, is you cotch him quick while I is still good and mad at him!"

With the new client gone, Bugwine breathed freely again—once. Then he

caught the look in his chief's eye and shrank rapidly to his right size. "Yeah, us is got a client again," said Mr. Collins blisteringly, "but de case is C. O. D.—and aint solved yit. So us cain't eat till it is—same as dat big table-knives mystery over at de Bees'-Knees' barbecue-stand what you been workin' on—and floppin' at—till he cuts our credit off."

A sharp knock at the front door interrupted. Mr. Collins shot out the back like a fire-chief answering a third-alarm in a loft.

BUGWINE opened the front door cautiously—to the postman with a circular. Columbus returned, looking sheepish. "Thank I heard somethin' out in de back," he explained with elaborate nonchalance.

"Acted more like you heard somethin' in de front."

"How I acts aint none your business! Git your mind back on dem knives!"

"Cain't locate who swiped 'em. Besides, maybe some de customers swaltered 'em; maybe de owner see 'em. Bees'-Knees git all dem knives from de white-folks' pawnshop, he say—"

"Aint matter if he git 'em from de dime-store; dey's his now! Or was till somebody took 'em off de tables in de stand right after he clean up good last week. Wid you bein' a flop on de case ever since he slip you dat spoon to match up wid what de crook took, when us cotch him! You still got dat sample spoon?"

Bugwine fumbled anxiously in his overalls, and produced it.

But Columbus immediately ignored it—to issue the ultimatum which Mr. Breck most dreaded. "Now," he rasped, "your 'spense-account done cut off, for in'ficiency: you either runs down dis Huntingdon Lamb or you nourishes yourself off a mess of fresh air. Done tired of foolin' wid short-sawed failures."

"Always gits my man," mumbled Mr. Breck resentfully beneath his noisy rattling of the agency's yardstick and bear-trap handcuffs. "Says so your own self!"

Unfortunately, his chief heard him, and whirled on him: "To de clients, yes! But to you I tells de truth: you aint nothin' but a bow-legged flop! So now, git bayin', boy! Git bayin' on dat ram-Lamb's trail!"

And Bugwine bayed. But all to no avail. Gnawed by appetite below, and despair above his neck, he combed Bap-



Mr. Breck found Amnesia taking exercise with Indian clubs. "In case you comes on dat ramblin' Lamb pretty quick," she explained.

tist Hill and Frog Bottom, Rock Cut and Lick Skillet. But none knew any Huntingdon Lamb, while a hundred fitted fruitlessly the description Amnesia had given of him.

Until, "Might as well git on," Mr. Breck ultimately addressed his clamoring stomach as it slowed and stopped him before Mr. Thompson's savory-smelling stand at dusk. "Old knives aint back on dem tables yit, I sees. And, go in dar widout, and all *you* gits is footsteps on *my* pants."

So, disconsolate in the darkness, a stumped and stymied sleuth headed for his headquarters. There he stumbled noisily on the broken front step that Columbus was always intending to mend.

Instant sounds of a back door being practically torn from its hinges within indicated both Mr. Collins' presence and state of mind.

"Dat long tall boy sho is skittish nowadays!" grumbled Mr. Breck as he eased into their sanctuary. "All time tearin' down dat door!"

But just here his chief entered ostentatiously at the front. "Jest gittin' back

from de rounds," he announced breezily if breathlessly.

"Jest gittin' back from round de house, you means," muttered Bugwine.

"Snap into your report, runt!" Columbus appeared in no mood to mess with inferiors.

"Sniffs on two; solves none." Hunger was making Bugwine succinct—also peevish.

But even as he reported, a giddiness seized upon and spun him. Yet it was not, he startlingly perceived, the giddiness of the unfed. Rather, it was the dizzying proof that any brain worked better above an empty stomach. "*I got it now!*" he bugled hysterically to a perplexed superior.

"Well, lay down a spell—maybe you'll git over it widout me fotchin' in de veterinarian for you." Mr. Collins misunderstood his helper's symptoms.

"Aint crave to git over it. It's a idea!" rebelled indignantly the proud if unaccustomed parent of an inspiration.

"What give *you* no idea? All you ever has is accidents in de head."

"De dark—"





"Psssst!" Mr. Breck signaled to his selection, a cigar-hued middleweight, with a darker damsel giggling at his side.

"De dark?"

"Uh-huh! Like dis: ain't all husbands look alike in de dark—no matter what dey name is?"

"Dey is—is it, and dey, dark enough." Columbus was but puzzled worse.

"Well, dat what I got now—a way to git us dat client's four dollars, quick! What is she crave for her money, nohow? To git to beat up a boy! All right, I gives her one to beat! Den she's happy, us is financial, and even Huntingdon Lamb is happy—"

Mr. Collins' inability to understand idiocy grew no better fast.

"What I does," Bugwine hastened further to display proudly his mental offspring, "is jest what you and dat motto yander on de wall keeps sayin': '*If You Cain't Catch de Crook, Create One.*' Meanin' I frames up a husband for Amnesia! Picks me out one dese women-chasers around Fish Alley what look about de same as Huntingdon in de dark, and I dates him up for her. When he keep de date, he git what's comin' to him nohow—from some other married woman's husband. On account of Amnesia thinkin' he's de Huntingdon Lamb she's lookin' for, and her layin' on him noble in de dark!"

Columbus started, blinked, hesitated. "Dat's a fine idea," he enthused gloomily. "Aint but jest one thing de matter wid it—"

"What dat?"

"It's yours. And if *you* thunk it up, it's oblegged to have spavins and saddle-galls on it somewhar."

Bugwine swelled like a blow-fish before criticism of his brain-child—and recognition that if he got much brighter, he was going to have to get himself stunned in order to get down to Columbus' mental level! "I been right heaps of times," he insisted doggedly.

"By accident, yeah. But if you thinks dis scheme is different, git on it quick; before not eatin' pulls you down too weak to wiggle. Becaze—no business; no barbecue: dat's de way you still stacks up wid me and Bees'-Knees, you duck-legged little flop wid de—"

But just here Mr. Collins' blistering inventory was interrupted, by the sound of running feet without—and his precipitate break for the rear door within—before they passed on in what proved to be but another false alarm.

ASSISTANT Detective Bugwine Breck jangled his bear-trap handcuffs appraisingly in Fish Alley by night, and eyed the dusky passing throng. "Hundred and fifty pounds, dark-complected, five-foot-eight—" he chanted Amnesia's general and generous specifications. When suddenly a passing form and face caught and held his fancy: this one would do!

"Psssst!" Mr. Breck signaled to his selection, a flashily dressed, cigar-hued middleweight, with a darker damsel giggling at his side.

The stranger turned inquiringly as Bugwine shrank deeper into the darkness of a doorway. "Come back by here directly—by yourself. Somethin' you aint crave to miss gwine come off," hissed Mr. Breck significantly.

The little sleuth, it soon proved, had correctly counted upon the persuasive power of curiosity in the human breast. In fact, he had never seen a boy, obviously and audibly with money in his pockets, able to get rid of a woman so fast before! It jingled on him as he walked.

"You *psssstin'* me jest now?" questioned the stranger truculently.

"Sho did. Lady axed me to."

The middleweight mellowed. "Women all time sendin' for me; but only de good-lookers gits me," he admitted.

"Sho is a looker dis time. Say she plumb crazy to meet you. Cravin' for me to fix it up."

"Well, what's keepin' you?" This just-hooked fish was already in a hurry!

"Nothin'; only dat date aint till to-morrer night." Bugwine recalled in time that he had the other or feminine half of this tryst yet to make.



"What-at and when?" Such interest was a real tribute to Bugwine's brain-power!

"By de band-stand, up near de cement-works, at nine 'clock. What you say your name?"

"Aint say. But Syntax Hammond, from down Troy-way. What youn?"

"Bugwine Breck. From de big Columbus Collins detectin' agency. But everybody call me 'de human bloodhound'—account always gits my man."

Then he added with an anxiety that was a work of art, earnestly: "You gwine be dar now, aint you, Mist' Hammond? You aint gwine stand dat good-looker up tomorrer night?"

FOR his part Mr. Hammond seemed staging some big recovery, but he rallied rapidly. "Stand her up? Boy, you tell her I's been dar two hours already!"

With half of his business thus so satisfactorily settled, Mr. Breck centered his efforts on the other half. This Syntax boy was a fast worker, all right, even if he had been swept off his feet by Bugwine's brains for a moment! Now, however, vindication for Mr. Breck's intellect and food for his stomach were both just around the corner. No more would the caustic Columbus list him as a dim-bulb, or Bees'-Knees as a cash-before-serving customer. Not after he pulled this one!

With such warming thoughts seething in his mind, the re-inflated Mr. Breck shuffled exuberantly toward the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel for Colored, Demopolis edition. Women rich enough to hire detectives to run down an erring mate, he reasoned, would naturally stop only at the best.

And again Bugwine was right. Indeed, it was getting to be a habit with him! Piloted by the hostelry's combination clerk-manager-bell-hop and chambermaid, Uncle Caesar, Mr. Breck found Amnesia taking light exercise in her room with a pair of Indian clubs. "In case you comes on dat ramblin' Huntington Lamb pretty quick now," she explained.

"Done got him now," Mr. Breck ran a spiritual tongue anticipatorily over the imminent sweets of victory.

Amnesia dropped a club on his foot. "Whar he?" she demanded eagerly, already halfway to the hall.

"Wait a minute! *Owww!*" Bugwine interrupted his own bunion-born anguish. "Us *big* detectives works scientific. Aint lay out in de woods all night waitin' for

a skunk: us jest sets a trap and lets him cotch hisself while smart boys sleeps. Dat's brains."

"Sho is! Cotchin' a Lamb in a skunk-trap. Whar at de trap, den? Crave to brain *him* while he's in it!" Animosity was out-talking alimony-outlook.

"Jest fixin' to tell you," groaned the limping Mr. Breck. "Trap done set, up by de bandstand at de cement-works grove, for tomorrer night at nine o'clock. I jest now finished baitin' it."

"Baitin' it wid what?"

"Wid you—"

"Wid *me*? You's dumb in de knob! Dat nigger aint gwine come widin a mile of it, den."

"But I aint *tell* him it's you. I jest tell him a good-looker is gwine be dar waitin', what's crazy to meet him."

"Crazy to meet him is right! Boy, you sho knows how to pick your bait scientific for *him*: put skirts on de trap-trigger, and you *got* dat ape! Every time! And gwine have to scald me to make me turn loose of him, too, when I is git my hands on dat ramblin' ram-Lamb! *Whuff!*"

All of which left Bugwine nothing to do but to get back to his agency and start telling Columbus how good he was.

But, arriving at his headquarters, he again stumbled noisily in the darkness upon that bad front step. And again there was the familiar sound of a back door being all but torn from its hinges by the haste of one within to be without.

IT was several minutes before Columbus appeared, slightly ashen-faced and badly winded, at the front. "Cotchin' myself a little mess of air," he explained thinly.

"Sounds like you aint able to git yourself stopped for a couple of miles after dat," retorted a turned-worm acidly. "What you so skeered of lately, nohow?"

"Aint skeered of nothin'. Jest careful—"

"Careful about *who*?"

Columbus fidgeted, choked, confessed. "I takes another boy's gal's clothes on de truck-ride de other night. He hear about how de truck busts down, and I aint git dem clothes home till most mornin'."

"Who *wants* clothes before mornin'?"

"Trouble was," a smoked-out Columbus came through unhappily with it, "dat boy's gal was *in* dem clothes. Now he's lookin' for me wid a gun."

"Ugh-oh!" Light broke over Bugwine.

"What *you* been up to?" Mr. Collins seemed eager to change the subject, "*—struttin' round like you was pattin' dem brains of yourn on de head wid both hands. What you ought to do is put 'em out of dey misery.*"

"Struttin' becaze I's scien-tif-ic—I done fixed everything; dat's what."

Columbus' jaw slackened. "You mean," he demanded incredulously, "you is done finally solved who swiped dem knives from Bees'-Knees' stand?"

Mr. Breck remembered that he had forgotten the barbecue-stand silver mystery. "Aint sniff out *yit* who done dat," he subsided slightly. "Expectin' imp—" "Yeah?" Mr. Collins cut him off. "Well, all you's doin about your meals, too, is *expectin' 'em.*" Gloom re-wrapped him. "Old score still two to nothin' against you, short-dog—two crimes and no clues."

"Well, git dis, big-mouth!" Bugwine rescued his original subject: "I jest come from framin' it up so Amnesia Lamb can git her hands on a husband—and us can git our hands on four bucks. Done bait de trap scien-tif-ic."

"You is, eh?" Columbus' skepticism remained prominent: if Bugwine devised it, it was wrong. Yet, he grudgingly admitted to himself, no flaws in Mr. Breck's current scheme had yet appeared. It would be too dark for identifications; the framed-up victim would be too startled to stay long for punishment; the client would be satisfied; and two detectives would have four dollars for sustenance. "Who you frame up for dat wildcat woman to light on?" he questioned.

"A boy from Troy, he say. Fits de description swell in de dark. And he cain't hardly wait for tomorrer night at nine to see de good-looker what I tells him is crazy to meet him by de bandstand den. I frames scien-tif-ic: he aint know he's fixin' to meet a bearcat wid buzzsaws on both feet. Name Syntax Hammond—"

**H**ERE Columbus appalled his assistant. By hitting the ceiling, both metaphorically and actually! "Says *huh?*" he howled in an odd choked voice. "Syntax Hammond. I cain't help what his mamma name him—"

"Aint *care* about his mamma!" Strong emotion was tearing terrifyingly now at the bug-eyed Mr. Collins. "What I craves to know now is, is *you* tell him your right name?"

"Tell him? I brags about it! I aint all time changin' my name, like some

boys—tells him it, and who I works for, too—de big Columbus Collins. Sho set him back, too!"

But Columbus was already clawing at the rear door like a tomat in a kennel.

"What de matter?" Bugwine stood agape at him.

"*Matter? MATTER? De matter* is you is done play hell again! Syntax Hammond is name of de boy what's lookin' for *me* wid de gun—about his gal and my truck-ride!"

**B**UGWINE swallowed a gasp and two tonsils. Memory cut back; no wonder Syntax had seemed startled at his mention of Columbus! "You aint tell me de name of who was gunnin' for you," he managed to gurgle hoarsely.

"Aint matter about de name before: sho Gawd matters now! Wid you got to pick out *him* to frame up, too! *Dumb!* And not only turnin' dat wildcat woman loose on him at de bandstand, but tellin' him our names *so he'll know who framed him*, too! . . . *Feets, rally rapid! Bullet-proof vest, come to Papa!* Whar-at dem canned groceries?"

"Groceries? How-come groceries?" The brain of Breck was being outdistanced by developments so fast that it was dizzied.

"To ration myself wid!" Columbus was gathering garments and a blanket frenziedly to him. "I got to hole-up under de freight-house now, till de dust and shootin' die down. Soon as old Syntax can git loose from dat she-cyclone,—and remembers who you told him framed him,—he'll be lookin' for *me right!* Wid both barrels! Aint I told you if *you* think it, it's *bound* to be wrong!"

The ravaged Mr. Breck merely panted despairingly in a circle—and failed to escape from a new and further fearful aspect of what he had done: this Syntax boy might have been gunning for Columbus before, but now he would be naming buckshot after Bugwine too! Again old brains had backfired fatally in the very face of their owner!

"Maybe I can call off de deal," he hazarded feebly from his own ruins.

"And let Amnesia Lamb find out you has jest been double-crossin' her to git her four dollars? Boy, I trifles wid tornadoes, and I toys wid tigers, but I aint *never* tell no married woman I tried to two-time her!"

Mr. Breck grew limper, aloft and in the lower limbs. And regretted that he had not run out of ideas sooner—before



"Sniff dis once," he estimated conservatively, "and you gits loop-legged on both sides. Couple of swallers, and dey has to lock up de lions to keep you from chokin' 'em to death."

he thought up this Frankenstein's monster frame-up. Already it was one of those things that had looked like a good idea at the time; but now—

"Anybody come here lookin' for me wid no gun, tell 'em to shoot you—I's done gone to Roosia!" And darkness engulfed a fast-departing Mr. Collins.

Alone in the night of his own predicament, Bugwine cast frantically about him for escape, and found none. Again, and as usual, he had neatly hog-tied, wrapped, addressed and delivered himself to his own doom.

"Was dey no way to git loose from 'em, I'd take my brains out in de woods and tie 'em to a tree and shoot 'em!" mourned one who had so recently boasted of their science. "Aint git me nowhars but in a jam. And so hongry I couldn't think wid 'em if dey was bright!"

But with his credit still four ciphers on the wrong side of the decimal-point—due to his past failures to detect who had stolen Bees'-Knees' knives—Mr. Breck was on a liquid diet.

"Craves to git out of my misery," he gloomily approached the friend who ran the nearest emporium of anesthetic.

"How long you want to be unconscious?"

"Till after nine tomorrer night. Keep me from worryin' myself about what gwine happen to me den."

The friend produced a flask. "Sniff dis once," he estimated conservatively, "and you gits loop-legged on both sides. Couple of swallows of it, and dey has to lock up de lions to keep you from chokin' 'em to death wid your head. But wrop yourself round *all* of what's in dis bottle, boy, and dey fires guns over you on de Judgment Day—to wake you up enough so you can hear old Gabriel's horn!"

Bugwine accepted eagerly. He wanted enough to make him lose all immediate interest in what was bound to happen to him. And lacking apothecary's measures, he drank by ear and upon an empty stomach. . . .

With two triphammers busy at top and bottom of his skull, and the taste of

fricasseed birds'-nests in his mouth, a five-foot sleuth awoke to uncertainty as to whether it were next Wednesday or last night. All about him lay not only an unfamiliar darkness, but silence too. Causing "*Where was he?*" to join hands with "*When was it?*" as Bugwine felt about him, and encountered nothing. He tried to rise, and the triphammers redoubled their blows as he sharply established the fact that he was under something both low and hard. Then a sudden sound near by added the disturbing information that he was not alone.

WITH agonizing effort and effect, the brain of Bugwine turned over on sanded bearings next—to evolve a fear. Indications pointed all too clearly to his being under that haven of the oppressed African, the old freight depot. In which case that sound had been caused by Columbus. And Columbus was opposed to overcrowding in cyclone cellars: any subordinate seeking to share *that* sanctuary would be run out, upon discovery.

This fear, however, was instantly elbowed aside by a greater, as there arose a further sound without and near by—that of a voice, vindictive and talking to its owner. Whereupon, and devastatingly, Bugwine knew all! Where he was and when it was, and what would happen to him! He was under the cement-works bandstand, and just prior to nine o'clock of the fatal night of his frame-up and funeral! For the voice was the voice of Amnesia in rehearsal of dire things soon to be. She was there, and Syntax Hammond was coming. And it was too late for Bugwine Breck to leave unnoticed now. He too would be present, convenient to whoever first suspected him.

"Sho Gawd wish't I'd lapped up dem two last laps in dat bottle and died permanent!" moaned Mr. Breck to himself, and waited, the sample spoon of Bees'-Knees digging into him through his overalls as he rocked in his wretchedness.

But there was not long to wait. Ardent footsteps eagerly approached. Peering from beneath the edge of the band-stand, Bugwine first heard them, then saw the loom of their maker—his victim—in the darkness. Syntax Hammond had come! Then Mr. Breck heard the quick answering gasp of the waiting Amnesia, saw the dimly outlined form of Syntax seem to stiffen. And after that—

The Assyrian coming down like the wolf on the fold was as naught beside the

onslaught of Amnesia! The only thing Bugwine had ever learned in Sunday-school shot through the paralyzed place that had been his mind—that about hell having no fury like a woman scorned. Regret at subjecting a stranger to such a fate for four dollars bit sickeningly into Mr. Breck. . . . It was worth five!

"Run off from *me* wid no barbershop-gal, is you!" mingled with the crash of the flower-pot Amnesia had evidently brought along for the purpose. "*Steal my weddin'-silver and train-ride wid dat trash wid it, is you!*" The tirade of a wife blended accusingly with the terrified squallings of a trifter.

Bugwine crept closer, enthralled, the noise of combat drowning the clatter of his bear-trap as it trailed behind him.

Amnesia was all over her victim now. Twice he essayed to run, and twice she laid him low with fresh flower-pots.

"Rambles amongst de ewe-lambs, is you!" punctuated the flail of the fastest fists Mr. Breck had ever seen, pummeling like pistons. "Boy, I'll fix you so you does all de *rest* of your ramblin' wid a crutch!"

Voices neared. Running feet. Far off, an ambulance siren screamed. Word was evidently getting about. But Syntax wasn't. Hunched, squalling, unarmed, he took it. Appalled, hypnotized by such capacity for punishment, the aching-headed Bugwine crept nearer still—speculated as his vision improved in the darkness upon the chances for boosting Amnesia's fee to five dollars, after all. She had long since passed any mere four dollars' worth of hide and hair now!

Then Syntax glimpsed the grown-in-cautious Bugwine.

TOO late, the startled little sleuth sensed his peril. He squawked sickly, broke wildly into flight. But in a flash, and with the howl of a double-crossed gorilla, the framee was upon his framer. Memory of Columbus' well-founded fear of this murderous Syntax only added to the blind but far from dumb panic of Mr. Breck. Woods and welkin rang with it. But deeds, not words, distinguished the attack of the misled Lothario who had come for love but remained for assault and battery.

Over and over, kicking, biting, gouging, clawing, rolled framer and berserk framee. However weak Syntax had shown himself on the defense with Amnesia, he was a one-man war now! Already enfeebled by the back-lash of his

flask, Bugwine felt himself waning, slipping—heard ambulances again, saw hospitals, cemeteries.

Speedier and hence earlier spectators already ringed the struggling pair. Also Amnesia, standing grimly by in event either weakened and essayed escape.

Nearer clanged the ambulance of Slim Silver the undertaking boy, in case—A fast-failing Bugwine heard it, dim and far. Then nearer, incredibly, the voice of Columbus Collins. But why had Columbus come now? Had curiosity lent furlough to his fears? Confusion mounted in a tottering mind. Columbus was alighting now from the ambulance, shouldering his way forward, as though seeing the gunless Syntax as otherwise and busily engaged were safety-assurance enough for him.

**B**UT just here all other wonder was wiped from the consciousness of Mr. Breck by a development so startling as to make of him practically a new man. For, incredible yet all but unmistakable, beneath his frantic and grappling fingers he felt—

Reserves that he did not know were in him answered the stimuli uncovered there. Bugwine squirmed, twisted, tore himself swiftly free.

"*Columbus!*" he squalled. "*Columbus! Quick! Bear-trap him—before I—*"

And thus, as Syntax lunged to renew the battle, came then the fresh blur of Columbus diving in one motion for bear-trap and limelight, both, before the clatter and click of the trap were drowned by another livelier clatter—that of table-silver showering downward in the dark from beneath the torn vest-lining of the framed-up Syntax Hammond!

Across the startled mind of Mr. Breck at this swept stunning visions then. He was even better than he had thought he was! He was about to prove himself a better sleuth by accident than Columbus had even been by design!

"*Hold him!*" clarified now the tenor of Mr. Breck. "*Hold him, Columbus! Hold him, bear-trap—while I shows everybody how good I is when I detects!*"

Simultaneously Bugwine was recalling that misunderstood jingling sound when he and Syntax first met, was ravaging the remoter fastnesses of his own rent overalls. Triumphantly he fished forth the sample spoon of Bees'-Knees. "*Hold him!*" bugled Mr. Breck again, "while I matches up! Always gits my —*up!*"

Just here the triumph-note of Bugwine Breck, however, broke, sickened, and died as the awful realization broke over him! Again he had blundered. Again he had arrested the wrong man, jumped at the wrong conclusion, ruined all hope for food or four-dollar fee, exposed Columbus and himself to renewed and nearer peril! For the silverware shed by Syntax in no respect matched the sample of the bereft Bees'-Knees! More, Bees'-Knees had lost knives—and these were forks!

Anew, and at the apex of his woe, there burst upon the cringing Bugwine once more the battle-cry of Amnesia. It could be naught else, for all the joyous note that rang throughout it! She had discovered his duplicity newly now, and would swiftly be upon him, to take up the work that the framed Syntax had just left off.

His own ears forthwith a-clangor with his own apprehensive outcries, the stricken Mr. Breck scarcely heard Columbus next in, "I done come on de ambulance, Bugwine, to make time—to tell you *us done lost Bees'-Knees' case for good.*"

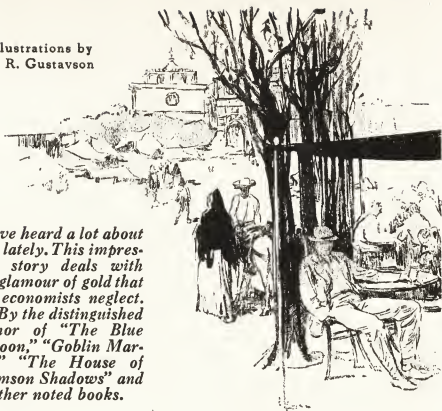
"Bees'-Knees," elucidated Columbus, "*done found* all dem knives he thunk was stole—right whar he'd put 'em away, in de wrong drawer, and forgot 'em! He say for us to come on back and start *eatin' out* his apologies!"

But what profited apologies to one about to die for double-crossing a married client to get four dollars? This was the thought that roweled Bugwine and roused his vocal cords afresh. And if those forks were *not* Bees'-Knees, then—

**S**PECULATION no sooner formed than shattered, however, before a verbal onslaught from Amnesia sent Bugwine reeling once again, in its revelation of the fullness of Mr. Breck's inadvertently Machiavellian qualities. Revelation ingrained in her question that, of necessity, stripped the now literally trapped "Syntax Hammond" of even his borrowed name. "Lawd, Mist' Breck, but you detectives sho *is* scien-tif-ic! Here de four bucks and de four bits. But out of all dem boys on Baptist Hill, how come it you picks out and baits up here for me de very right one—dis *Huntingdon Lamb* I got by de neck here, wid de skunk-trap on his leg, and even dem weddin'-forks I'd thunk was gone for good, done showered back noble now from 'neath his vest to me!"

Illustrations by  
L. R. Gustavson

*We've heard a lot about gold lately. This impressive story deals with one glamour of gold that the economists neglect. . . . By the distinguished author of "The Blue Lagoon," "Goblin Market," "The House of Crimson Shadows" and other noted books.*



# The Gold Bar

By H. DEVERE STACPOOLE

THE sun was setting to the tonking of church bells, the smell of Spanish cigarettes and the occasional notes of a guitar. There were other smells and other sounds, but less important, less racy of the city of Sulphurous Pleasures and of the Plaza del Sol.

I think that is still the name of the great square near the cathedral, where the vultures strut and waddle, and Perrira's café, if it still exists, casts the shadow of its awning on the marble-topped tables, at one of which this evening Carlin was seated smoking a panetela and taking in the other guests; men in Panama hats, bearded men; Mexicans all the way down from the border, extraordinary Jews, Christians no man could place, a few store clerks from the business houses of the city, and

Perrira's pet monkey—a spidery brute that went about from table to table on the lookout for drinks and cigar-ends.

Carlin was not a bit happy; it wasn't so much that he was down, if not out, as far as money went, or that he was disappointed in the business that had brought him here: it was just the crowd at the tables; their unknown types depressed him, these men remote from his world as Martians, or the vultures strutting in the plaza, or the monkey. He was surrounded by a loneliness more desolating than the loneliness of the desert or the sea.

A man came along pushing his way between the crowded tables, big and burly, with a jovial red clean-shaved face, hat tilted back, and an unlit cigar between his teeth. He was looking for a





Carlin was seated at one of the café tables. He was surrounded by loneliness; these unknown types depressed him.

seat, and seeing Carlin's table and an unoccupied chair, took it with half a word of apology and drummed on the table with his fingers for the waiter. Then, without preamble, and as though he and Carlin were old acquaintances, he struck up talk:

"Hot as a stewpan, aint it? It's the flagstones take the heat, and let it out—Say, what are you havin'? Have one on me? What have you been havin'? Gin and tonic. Hi, there, Antonio Alonzo what's-your-name, two zins and toniques—same as the gentleman has been havin'; *pronto*, look alive-o! Darn, yellow slug—it's the same with all these Jack Spaniards; they want windin' up."

He lit his cigar and tilted back in his chair. He had been here three days trying to do some business, and failing; the

Spaniards were so slow and so cautious, they'd sniff a proposition and turn it over till there was no life left in it, and then they'd tell you to come back tomorrow; his name was Simon Dare, home town Quincy.

Carlin concurred in all this gentleman said regarding the city and its ways and its folk. He too had been trying to do some business with regard to a mine; he had come with letters of introduction from Silbermeyer of San Francisco to the president of the Trentino Company, had wasted nearly a week, only to find there was nothing to be done. "Cost me five hundred dollars to come, reckoning the hotel expenses; and it will cost me another to go back," said Carlin.

"Well, it's lucky you have the five hundred dollars to take you back," said Dare. "Many a chap has been stranded here with less an' had to work his way out of the durned place through the fo-c'stle. Funny, me meeting you, and us two in the same fix. Me? I'm going to El Paso down the coast tomorrow. I'm going to mule-back it; it's only a three days' ride, and if you'd like to hire a



"Only one man and a horse," said Dare. "It's the vultures that've spread the bones."

mule and come along with me, I might be able to put you in the way of something at El Paso. I'm going on along there about a concrete proposition—if there is nothing doing, you could ship from there cheaper than here. There's always coasters going up north from El Paso besides the regular mails."

It seemed to Carlin that there might be something in this: he liked the other, and was hungry for friendship; and when Mr. Dare proposed that they should go and dine together at the Café Madrid, each paying his own expenses, he fell in with the idea at once.

THE Café Madrid was,—perhaps still is,—one of the finest on the South American seaboard. There is a lot of money spent there, but it is unconventional in some ways; for instance, to dine there, you are not necessarily expected to wear evening clothes, as at the Presidio. Many of the guests did, and Dare as they ate pointed out several well-known figures at the different

tables. That man with the pointed black beard was Alvarez, the banker; and the fellow with the girl who was wearing a flower in her hair, was Lopez, the chief man of the Peruvian tobacco company; he was married, but the girl was not his wife. The man at the table beyond, dining all alone, was Gomez; he had a funny history (commercial), but he was not alone in that peculiarity.

It struck Carlin that if his companion had only been four days here, he had a pretty wide and extensive knowledge of the inhabitants, but he did not remark on the fact or give it a second thought: this jovial and warm-hearted man had captured his fancy—so much so, that presently he began to talk about himself, his past and his prospects. He had been pretty unfortunate in business in Liverpool, England—trading in timber till the MacLarens had gone bust and knocked him completely off his feet; he had been forced into bankruptcy, but managed to pay his creditors ten shillings on the pound, and had got his dis-

charge—when an aunt died and left him money which was enough to clear himself with the creditors and leave a few hundred over.

"But see here, man," cut in Dare, "hadn't you got your discharge?"

"Yes," said Carlin.

"Then what in the nation did you want paying your money to those guys for?"

"What guys?"

"The creditors. Your slate was wiped clean."

"Maybe, according to law," said Carlin, "but not in my mind. I owed them the money just the same, discharge or no discharge; it was like a grit in my eye. Besides, I wanted to feel that no man could call me a bankrupt."

"Well, you take the bun!" said Dare. "And after you'd paid them—"

"I heard of a chance in San Francisco; five hundred wasn't any good for starting again in Liverpool, so I pushed out. It was five hundred and fifty really, and the fifty brought me across. I started in shell in a small way, with the man who had asked me to come out; and we were getting along all right when the bottom dropped out of shell. There was a slump in mother-of-pearl—it had gone out of fashion somehow or another, and the wharves and godowns were crammed with shell. We cleaned up just on the margin with no debts, only our money lost. That was eight months ago, and I got a job and saved enough to come down here after this mine proposition which has turned out a dud."

"Well, it aint every day you meet Probity in a pair of breeches," said Dare. "Here's my respects to you! All the same and without offence, I'm thinking you'd make more money in Barnum's show as an exhibit of Virtue than you'll make in Frisco in a business way; but that's your lookout. Well, what do you say about El Paso tomorrow?"

CARLIN had been turning this business over in his subconscious mind, and had decided on it: it was as cheap to get back to San Francisco from there as from Lima; and according to Dare, there was the possibility of some business turning up.

"I'll come," said he. "There's only the question of my luggage. It only amounts to a suitcase and a rug. Still, you said we'd have to go on mule-back—"

"Could you get your stuff into a couple of saddle-bags?" asked Dare. . . . "That's

right—and you say the suitcase isn't worth more'n a few dollars, so you can buy another at El Paso. You're staying at the Bolivar? Well, I'll tell you, I'll call there for you tomorrow sunup, and take you to Gomez's yard. He's the chap that hires and sells horses and mules. You'd better buy, and sell again at El Paso—won't cost you more than twenty dollars."

"Right," said Carlin.

A LITTLE after sunrise, Carlin having paid his hotel bill the night before, they were at the yard where Gomez buys, sells or lets for hire, horses, mules, burros, anything with four legs that can be ridden or driven, bar oxen. Half an hour later they were on the outskirts of the city heading north, the mules going well and the sun hot on the land and on the great beach that runs from Lima and Callao to Truxillo and beyond.

Gomez had not only supplied the mules, but for an extra few dollars their old saddles and trappings, water-bottles and a couple of bundles of dried grass to be held in reserve for the animals. The night before Dare had bought some provisions; and they would be able to get stuff on the way, except in the region of the sands. Dare had spoken of this region of the sands, and Carlin had got it into his head that it was just a short bit of desert to be crossed. But the sands when reached disclosed themselves not as a desert to be crossed but a beach to be held to. On one side the Pacific falling in ruled and rhythmic breakers, an occasional sea-bird flying in the blazing light above the spindrift and spray; on the other, dunes and levels of sand, an occasional vulture floating in the blue far above. Behind vanished Lima and Callao; in front the sands and sea-foam consumed in the far distance by a haze where all was lost.

Occasionally, it is true, they came upon an oasis where sea-grass put up a fight for life and where the mules could have a feed and so save the bundles of fodder; and occasionally they came upon a stream of fresh water that had worked a runnel for itself, the last remains of a river that had traveled for hundreds of miles to find the sea.

All the same, the waterless Sahara would have had a less depressing effect on the mind of Carlin than this blinding beach with its eternal thunder, fume and desolation. Nothing ever came here from the sea except driftwood brought

south by the current; nothing from the land except the wind from the far mountains, nothing from the sky but the vulture in the blue yet ever ready to drop.

Once Carlin, looking up attracted by a remote cry, saw a condor with motionless wings, yet moving with speed toward the distant hills; and once, far ahead, they saw the ghost of a city in the gauze-blue distance—a mirage that might have been Lima, Truxillo, who could tell—before it flickered and went out, leaving the desolation untouched, a desolation so complete that one might have imagined no other travelers had ever trodden this coast road to the city of El Paso del Sur.

Before noon on the second day of their journey, however, they met with another traveler who had been waiting the chance of their coming for days, weeks—possibly months.

THEY had made a detour to avoid a patch of dangerous sand that Carlin's mule avoided. Dare's mule, defective some way in smell or instinct, would have kept on; and they were talking of this difference in the animals when Carlin's eyes were attracted by something ahead, white like a spread of mushrooms or the contents of a laundry-basket tossed here and there. When they reached the spot, they found bones; a spread of bones strewn over a space twice or thrice the area of an ordinary dining-room floor.

"Only one man and a horse," said Dare, pointing to a human skull and the skull of a horse. "It's the vultures have spread them—torn off the clothes; look at those rags." He dismounted and picked up the human skull. The parietal bone on the left side showed a hole; the bone on the opposite side was nearly blown away. The owner of the skull had been shot.

"Murder or suicide," said Dare. He went to the skull of the horse and examined it. "Murder!" He nodded. "It's been shot too—look at the forehead bone. First the man, then the gee to stop it from tellin'."

"He might have shot it first, then shot himself," said Carlin.

"Might, but not probable."

Carlin went to an old saddle that was lying among the bones and tossed it over with his foot; then he turned to a brown saddle-bag lying near it and turned out the contents: some clothes, a linen coat, a pair of socks, a waistcoat wrapped

round something heavy and hard. He unwrapped it, and a block of yellow metal as big as a brick fell on the hard sand with a thud.

Dare picked it up.

"Gold!" said he. "Good gosh! A gold bar, by all that's lucky."

"Gold!" said Carlin. "You sure?"

"Yep. Feel of it—smell it!" Dare handed it over, and Carlin with the weight of it in his hand, felt a thrill never before experienced. It was like touching Fortune herself.

They sat down on the sands to talk of this business, the bar between them. It was Carlin's find, but he would not have found it had not Dare brought him along on this traverse. "We'll go half and half," said he. "The only bother to me is if the chap has been murdered—"

"Yes?"

"Well, isn't it up to us to give information?"

"Good Lord!" said Dare. "It's Peru—besides, it's maybe a year ago, maybe more. I couldn't tell the age of these bones at first, but I can guess it now; they're dried out. Look!" He picked up a rib and snapped it. "They've been sanded over and sanded over, them and the trappings; a wind up from Chile would cover them, same as you shook sugar over a puddin'; a wind down from Ecuador would strip 'em again; that's the way of it. I reckon they have been more than half the time hidden; that's why the bag hasn't been tampered with. Besides, any spigotties traveling along here wouldn't have touched this place, anyhow. Superstitious. They have a saying: 'Where one man falls, another may trip,' or somethin' like that. But we aren't superstitious, are we?"

He picked up the bar and fondled it, feeling its delicious weight; then they rose and stowed it in Carlin's saddle-bag, and rode on their way, still talking of the matter.

DARE was undoubtedly right. They had struck an old story, and telling it to the Peruvian authorities would not do much good. What could they say? "We found the bones of a man and a horse in the sands on our way here, and we think there may have been foul play: the bones were very old." That story would not move one cocked-hatted *gendarme* to raise a finger in the matter, much less a foot.

If they told about the gold, there would surely be endless trouble, to say



When Carlin woke, he found himself alone; Dare had made off with the gold bar!

nothing of the fact that it would be taken from them. No, their course was clear; either say nothing about it, or fling the thing away.

"I know a chap at El Paso," said Dare. "He'll give us two-thirds of the value in coin. We've got to lose a bit over it, anyhow, and that won't hurt us much, since we paid nothing for it."

At sunset they made their camp by simply hobbling the mules.

It was windless weather, and as they ate their supper seated on the warm sands, they had for companion the Pacific Ocean breaking only a hundred yards away, the sinking sun looking at them over the water and gilding the mountains of Peru, above which the western sky was deepening and darkening with the rising night.

Carlin took the first watch; for the mules, even though hobbled, could not be left unattended; when half the night was through, he awoke Dare, lay down with his head on a sand pillow, and was asleep at once. . . .

When he awoke, the stars were near gone and the east beginning to get light.

He found himself alone.

Dare was gone, and one of the mules. Carlin's saddle-bag, which had contained a few clothes, some provisions and the gold bar, was gone. He had dropped to sleep with it lying beside him, and it was gone. He rose to his feet.

The beach away north and south was visible in the strengthening daylight.

Nothing moved on it or gave sign of life except the waddling white-gray form of a gull.

The mule was standing near by with its head down. It was unhobbled. Well, the thing was clear enough. Dare had played a dirty trick and made off with the bar—a damnably dirty trick, for he had unhobbled his companion's mule, trusting that it would wander away leaving Carlin without food and depending on what water he could get on the beach.

The big burly good-natured-looking man had suddenly turned into *this*. Only among human beings is such a metamorphosis possible.

CARLIN went to the mule, standing head down as if tired, and took the bridle. A long piece of cord was tied to the bridle-ring and lay trailing on the sand; it was the lead which Gomez had supplied in case one of them wished to go on foot and turn his animal into a led mule.

It was clear enough that Dare had not contented himself with unhobbling the animal; he had taken it off with him, leading it. Yet here it was, returned. What was the meaning of that? Had he released it, or had it broken away from him?

Having found that the food in the saddle-bag was untouched and the water-bottle still half full, Carlin mounted.

The sun's brow was just rising above the horizon, lighting the sands, and

Carlin, as he sat in the saddle before starting, followed with his eyes the hoof-marks visible on the sand.

They told the whole story:

The hoof-prints of Dare's mule showed striking down toward the sea edge to get to the harder sands, the hoof-prints of the led mule close and a bit behind.

Carlin followed.

On the hard sands the prints pointed north toward El Paso. That was enough; he turned north, and letting the mule take its own gait, rode along by the singing sea, the rising sun on his right cheek, and on his left side the stalking, far-flung shadow of himself and his mount, like the shadow of a man on a dromedary.

AS he rode, he turned things over in his mind.

They might have been worse. His money was intact, simply because he had it in his pocket; it would have been impossible to have taken it without awakening him; he had food enough, and water and a mount. What would have been his position if the mule had not returned to him? By what miracle had it returned? Had Dare released it for some reason, or had it broken away from him? Even if so, why had it returned? He could find no answer. . . .

But half an hour later, feeling hungry, he stopped, dismounted, and undoing the strapping of the saddle-bag, put his hand in and felt something hard and heavy that was not the tin of sardines or bread he was searching for. He took it out: it was the gold bar.

There was nothing strange in the business. He had put it there yesterday evening, strapped the bag and gone to sleep with the bag beside him. Dare had simply slung the bag where it belonged and gone off, leading the mule. So fixed had been Carlin's mind on the loss of the gold and Dare's evasion, that he had not divided the idea of the gold and the robber. He had never dreamed that the bar might still be in the saddle-bag; his subconscious mind had showed it in the personal possession of Dare. Well, here it was, anyhow, miraculously returned; and so excited was Carlin, that he put it back into the bag and did up the strappings again without bothering about food. His hunger had vanished for the moment; and mounting again, he rode on.

Gold had him in its miraculous power. The bar of yellow metal, back in his pos-

session, gave him strength. It seemed to him that the energy of ten men had suddenly been injected into his veins.

The thing was his. Dare, after what he had done, could have no claim on it. He visualized a meeting with Dare, and what he would say to him, and if need be do to him, should they meet; he strained his eyes ahead on the chance of sighting him; but in the distance before him lay nothing but the sands and the long white line of the foam of the sea. . . .

He had fallen into a reverie, from which he was suddenly aroused by the mule coming to a halt.

Right in front of him lay something on the sands. It was Dare's hat. He could not be mistaken, for its owner had plucked yesterday a sprig of sea-lavender and stuck it in the band—and there was the sprig. Carlin urged the mule forward, but the mule refused to move; it seemed afraid of the hat. He got down and leading it by the bridle, brought it forward a few steps, but it backed and plunged and set its legs, sweating and evidently in fear. Then Carlin knew: The sands just beyond the hat were slightly paler than those on his side. He picked up a piece of coral rock lying by his foot, and flung it just beyond the hat. It was swallowed almost instantly, as though thrown into water, and the greedy quicksand as it closed on its prey, pursed up and settled like a small mouth smacking its lips after a *bonne bouche*.

Now the whole thing was clear: Dare, riding in the dark under the last of the stars, had blundered on this place. His mule had no sand sense; but leaving that aside, the darkness alone would be accountable for the disaster.

The led mule had broken away and returned on its tracks to the camping-place. That was all.

Yards, maybe fathoms, under that yellow sunlit surface lay the man who had betrayed his friend, left him maybe to starve, for a piece of gold; there to lie till the Last Trumpet—if ever that sound could reach him in such a place.

IT was seven weeks later, into the office of Mr. Silbermeyer in Fourth Street, San Francisco, that Carlin came.

"That business," said Carlin, "turned out no use. I've come back. I haven't much left after paying my passage; but on the ship I met a man who has put me up to what I believe is a good thing: it



has to do with nitrates. I want a thousand dollars to go into it, and I want you to lend me that thousand—here's my security."

He took the gold bar from his pocket and handed it over.

SILBERMEYER took the thing and handled it and fondled it and felt its delightful weight. He was worshiping—worshiping the only god worshiped by all men in all times honestly and devotedly.

"I found it by an extraordinary accident on the seacoast away down in Peru," said Carlin. "It is mine entirely. No one else has any claim to it—you must take my word for that."

"Your word," said Silbermeyer, "is as good as your bond. I know all about that Liverpool business, and I know your record here. Yes, I will lend you a thousand dollars on it."

"There is only one thing," said Carlin. "It must remain in my possession, where it will be just as secure as though locked in your safe; and you have my word that should this venture fall through and the thousand dollars be lost, I will return it to you. All that sounds funny; but you will understand it when I say that this thing to me is more than a mascot: it is strength and energy—it is gold. I could sell it to lots of people; but then I would have to part company with it, and it is my partner. We are Carlin, Gold & Co.; and the very touch of my partner, the knowledge, even, that he is in my pocket or my safe, at my side, even though he is pawned to you, will give me pep and kick and success."

"He is your mascot?"

"No, any old thing can be a mascot—yes, in a way a mascot, but the greatest of all mascots. Gold!"

Mr. Silbermeyer laughed. He understood.

"Here," he said, "take your partner. Yes, I will lend you a thousand dollars on him. I put him into your integrity as I would put him into my safe: you will succeed. Pay me whenever you like."

Three months later Carlin paid him back; that was on June 1st, 1909.

On January 2nd, 1933 (last year), Carlin, the fourth richest man in the State of California, had Fontenelle, a high official of a national bank, to dinner. The two men were old and fast friends, and after dinner, and warmed by a bottle of priceless Tokay, old Mr. Carlin—he was

sixty-six—told the story of the gold bar to his companion. He told it fully, and for the first time: told of the meeting with Dare, the finding of the bar, the death of Dare, the loan from Silbermeyer. "And this is it," said he, getting up and unlocking a safe that stood in a corner of the room, a safe so cunningly constructed that a burglar carelessly—or indeed in any way—handling it, would first be shot, then electrocuted, to the sound of bells ringing all over the house. He took from a bag of violet velvet the precious bar, and handed it to Fontenelle—who weighed it, examined it, took it to the window and pondered over it, and then, while Carlin was helping himself to a cigar, took a knife from his pocket and scratched it. He came back from the window, and putting the bar on the table, sat down.

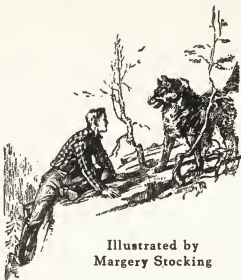
"You said Silbermeyer lent you a thousand dollars on that bar?" asked he.

"Yes," said the other, lighting a cigar.

"Well, he didn't, really: he lent it on your character, on your known honesty, Carlin—that's what he lent it on. Otherwise he would have had it tested. The thing is a dud—one of the old gold-bricks swindlers used to palm off. I've seen 'em before—solid lead with ten dollars' worth of plating on it."

THE old gentleman took this badly. It was not the shattering of a mascot that troubled him, for a dud brick would be just as good, in the strange world of mascots, as a bent sixpence or an elephant's-tail hair. What worried him was the disturbance of his sense of values. Gold appeared to him suddenly, and rightly, as having no value except in the world of imagination; it seemed to him, and rightly, that if all the gold in the world were turned suddenly into lead, it would not matter a button, so long as men imagined the lead to be gold; and this, by extension, seemed to apply to all property values.

The fact, pointed out to him by Fontenelle, that his fortune was not founded on a lump of lead, but on the gold of his commercial integrity—since Silbermeyer would not have lent a penny on the brick without testing it, had it been brought to him by a doubtful character—this fact left him cold; it did nothing to counteract the unpleasant feeling that all wealth is of the nature of a dream. An unpleasant feeling—at least for a multi-millionaire who has labored to earn his millions.



Illustrated by  
Margery Stocking

**H**IGH PLATEAU lay in 'the Stone Ridge country. Cupped in the lap of the great hills it swung its shelter open to the sky, like a cradle, or a sanctuary, or a little paradise of the wilderness, as indeed it was. There was a spring in its middle where the great red lilies grew in summer, and where the grass grew lush and high, and coarser forage clothed it like a carpet.

It lay far from any habitation, from any life other than that of hoof and horn, of padding foot and spreading wing. Yet it had seen tragedy, and love, and life. It had seen man's face too, for one short season, mirrored in its virgin depths, for there had been a trapper once who lived at High Plateau for a winter. He had been a strange man, hiding from something, and death had overtaken him late one night in the snow, over on the far side of Papoose Peak. His bones still lay there, and in the fringe of the pines at High Plateau there still stood the tiny cabin he had made with such infinite labor.

No other human had been there since; but many and many a night Brush-tail the wolf had padded silently around it, sniffing. Brush-tail knew the country of the Stone Ridge in every crevasse, every cranny. He had been born there, in a cave under Hanging Rock, and he had lived his whole life there.

He was a great hunter; and he lived well in his savage fashion, and many were the helpless fawns that went to keep his thick gray pelt so fine. But he was no coward when it came to bigger game. There was no fear in him.

He could remember many a battle royal in the years that had passed.

# War in the

By VINGIE

## *The drama of a mountain*

The time, for instance, when he had found the great buck with a broken leg, and had thought to feast full with little effort. But he had been mistaken. The buck was old Ten-point, and he was a monarch of monarchs. That fate had crippled him was a tragedy, a pity and a waste, for he was the fastest thing that ran the Stone Ridge country. It had been a trick that did for him, a hidden cleft in a stone that caught his right foreleg, and snapped it as he landed from a twelve-foot jump, and he had hung about the mountain in thirst and suffering for days. And then he found the spring in High Plateau.

Four hours later Brush-tail found him. It had been early day then, with all the mountains sweet with silence and pale sun. It was late day when the fight was over and Brush-tail gave the matter up. He was cut and bleeding in a hundred places, his pale yellow eyes with their active pupils were rimmed with red, and he was astonished beyond all reasoning out.

But the great buck still stood on his three good legs with his rump against a rock that reared its protecting height a bit below the spring, and the hair was up along his spine, his antlers squared before him. He too was cut and slashed from the fangs of Brush-tail, but he was in far better case than the wolf, at that.

His broken leg healed—crooked, to be sure, and a handicap henceforth; but he lived to fight many another tilt. Brush-tail saw him sometimes in the later years, but never again did he give him gage of battle. The old she-bear over on Smoky Mountain was another foe of Brush-tail. But the wolf's arch enemy was Slip-along the panther. Slip-along was tawny as the earth littered with its dead pine needles, and he measured nine feet from nose to tail-tip. He was sleek and shining in good years, heavy-shouldered, hard in his long muscles, graceful and full of beauty. His voice was deep as thunder when he called a challenge on some windy slope in the

# Wilderness

E. ROE



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*fastness that was both sanctuary and battleground.*

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moonlight, high and shrill like a woman's scream when he hunted for his prey. It had the ancient trick of mystifying that prey too, seeming to be faint and far away, the closer he came. A terrible beast was Slip-along, and every other living thing in the Stone Ridge country feared him.

Every other thing save Brush-tail. The wolf hated him from the ground up, and the panther returned the hatred in full. For one reason, they knew, these two, that as wolves and panthers went, they were as evenly matched as possible. In deadly length Slip-along had the advantage; but Brush-tail was taller at the shoulder, and quick as the other was, he was a trifle quicker. And they had hated each other from the time, years back when both were in their scrawny youth, that they had come to conclusions and fought out their differences on the slopes of Smoky just across the gulch. That too had been a battle royal, but unlike the one with Ten-point, it had left Brush-tail with a never-dying desire to fight it over. Indeed they had fought it over—five times in the passing years. After each fight both had lain up for weeks nursing their wounds, had each been unable to hunt, and had nearly starved in consequence.

But they were wary of each other now, always watching for the slight chance which might tip that nicely balanced scale of power one way or the other. And it had never come.

So the seasons passed, and these two arch-enemies still hunted in the Stone Ridge country, still listened to each other's hunting-cries with rising hackles and eyes spreading in the darkness.

An then, in a certain spring when the sweet winds whispered on the pine-clad slopes and tall red lilies grew in the sheltered places, a human came to High Plateau.

This was a man, and there was a lot behind him. He was a tall man, slender in his fine outing clothes, too slender.

His face was thin in the cheeks, and very white, and his large blue eyes were clear as the singing spring among the grasses and much deeper. They were too deep for any human eyes to be, for they held the bodies of drowned hopes and loves, of ambitions and desires, of all the things that make life worth living.

He came into the Stone Ridge country with a string of pack-mules laden high with everything a man might need to keep life in him indefinitely, and he cast about for a place to make his habitation.

He spent three days searching the country and then he found the gently sloping meadow, and the cabin of the dead trapper all ready to his hand. It seemed to him like a promise, and a benediction on his quest, the shining of a Grail, somehow, and he brought his great store of provisions and dumped them in the little yard where the cleared grasses had encroached again. He loosed the mules and let them go, with their halters hung on their empty pack-saddles and the bell jinny at their head, according to instructions given by their owner from whom he had hired them. They would come home, the owner said, wondering at this strange man who wanted no one, not even a pack-train driver, to know his secret place of refuge. And it was refuge. A hiding-place from a world which had not done kindly by him, a sanctuary in the wilderness where the man hoped to get back to health, to life, if it were possible, and perhaps to God.

IT was a hundred-to-one chance he took. He knew that well. The best doctor in San Francisco had told him that. Also his own soul told him. But what matter?

He had had a lot of life. Money, the things that money buys. He still had the money, safely cared for, willed away in case— But the things of life that count he did not have. Love, for instance, and that loyalty that goes with it hand in hand if it be true.



The huge wolf clamped his great jaws and held—for his life and the man's life.

It had not been true. But oh, how sweet it had been! A golden glory that was false. He had been a fairly decent man, as manhood goes, and he had loved his wife with all the passion in him, had given her everything in his power, fidelity and gentleness, luxury and peace.

And she had thrown them all away with a snap of her rose-leaf fingers, a wave of her cigarette in its jeweled holder. As there grew on him the illness that sapped his strength, that set the red flag of danger in his thinning cheeks, she had told him airily that she was through, that she wanted to go away. And she had gone—with his best and oldest friend! So—it was finished. And he was all but finished. But there was something in him, some fine nicety of the spirit, which held up his head against the pulling droop, made him raise his blue eyes to the blue heavens—and buy himself three years' provisions, hire a train of pack-mules.

And here he was, lost to his world as entirely as if he had died and been buried, with a heart that ached at every turn, and a cough that would not be stilled.

It took him days and days to move his belongings to places of safety. The cabin could not hold a third of them, though he lined it from floor to rafter with his precious tins. So he built a platform of saplings which he cut with his ax, and stored them painfully thereon, covering them with heavy canvas, tied down at the corners.

Before the fall,—if he lived that long,—he would do better by them, build more securely. He had tools and conveniences, a fine rifle and ammunition, books in vest-pocket editions that would give him comfort for many moons.

And when all this was done, he stood on the High Plateau and looked at his lone green world with a grave face.

He was launched on his fight, his bridges burned.

So the days began to come and go in loneliness, in majesty and great beauty, in such a stillness that it could be heard. The sunrise was a thing worth getting up to see; and he got up, since he went to bed at twilight. He loved the first soft light above the Stone Ridge, the hush of the pines, the feel of the coming day, the glow, the bloom of rose above the darkened hills. It was all awesome, all beautiful beyond words. He wished sometimes that he had got himself a dog. No blooded animal of the cities, but some little friendly fellow, picked up homeless on some street, perhaps, or got from a pound.

It was too late now, however, and he tried to make friends with a gray squirrel who lived in a pine behind the cabin. This was a fascinating thing and filled many a still hour. It was successful too, and culminated in a week or two with the saucy chap stretching along the ground toward him with many a scolding, many a tail-twitching, to get the raisins which the man tossed toward it. It was a fine squirrel, shining and fat, with a tail like a silver plume and eyes

as black as sloes. The man named him, Barney and he came to know the word, and that it stood for raisins. The friendship grew precious to them both.

The smell of the pines was sweet as perfume and the man drew it deep into his lungs long hour by long hour, hoping. The long, young summer days went by.

He had brought a hammock with him, a sturdy thing of rope and canvas, and he hung it between the pines, and spent whole afternoons in it, reading.

He had been two months in his wilderness when he got his first knowledge of Slip-along. This was on a night when the moon rode high and the big cat had come home to his familiar haunts from a long trip over on Papoose, and he told all the world of his return, with screams to high heaven. The unearthly sound brought the man upright in his bed, his hair creeping on his scalp. He was no coward, but there is something in a panther's scream that chills the blood.

He listened with the breath held in his throat, and something that was like a premonition of trouble took hold on him, and he got up and closed the cabin's open door. But just as he closed it, he heard something else, something that was like an answer to the panther's cry. This was so savage, so deep, so high, that it was, if anything worse than the other, a long, ululating howl.

Brush-tail, over on the farther shoulder of Smoky, told his ancient enemy that he was here and unafraid. So the man knew that there was feud in the mountains.

After that he carried his rifle whenever he went abroad, and he took no chances on trail or slope or open, always scanning everything in sight with careful eyes. He knew he was in no particular danger, for he was enough kin to the wild to realize that neither cat nor wolf would harm him of its own volition—especially in summer, when the predatory creatures were fat and full fed. Winter might be another matter, but winter was not yet here.

IT was in October that he got his first glimpse of Brush-tail, on a heavenly day of warm sun and blazing vine-maple in the lower flats. He was coming home from a long climb down to a little place where the manzanita berries were red-brown and mealy. His pockets were bulging with the little odd fruits which he was taking home for Barney. The squirrel lived in his cabin now, very

frankly and cockily, sitting on the table's edge when he had his meals.

The man climbed slowly and finding a convenient rock, sat down to rest—and turning, looked full into the face of the most monstrous timber wolf he had even seen. It stood so tall at the shoulder that its head was above a man's waist, and its pale eyes, yellow as gold, were fixed on him steadily. For a terrible, tranced moment they stared at each other, the hair rising on both of them. Then, for some unaccountable reason, the man thought of the dog he had wished for and before he knew it he had spoken aloud.

"Hello, old boy," he said.

There was no fear in his voice, only the genial, friendly tone one uses to his four-footed friend, and he was astonished at himself.

Brush-tail was astonished too, for he had never heard a human voice before, and this one bore neither terror of his presence, or challenge to his supremacy. It was entirely new and curious.

HE looked long at this strange creature with its alien smell, raising his unspeakable muzzle to sniff its scent, turning his great head a bit to this side and that. Then the man moved, held out his hand. At that the wolf leaped like a flash back into the brush and was gone.

The man went on home, but he did not forget the meeting. Neither did Brush-tail forget it, and on a moonlit night in the following week he padded about the familiar cabin which now bore this new creature's scent. He watched the place carefully, sitting on his haunches in the shadow of a pine at the meadow's edge, and there were other scents on the air too, the sweetness of strange foods which tickled his nostrils. There had been fish recently fried, and bacon. The man was sleeping quietly—he could sleep better, it seemed, these long, sweet nights, did not cough so often; but Barney the squirrel, curled on his bed's foot, sat up on his silver tail and screeched at the top of his lungs, angrily. The man put out a drowsy hand and quieted him.

And presently Brush-tail was gone, a shadow among the shadows.

So the fall drew on apace and the man had finished his building of a safe place for his vast provisions, a dugout in the earth, lined and covered with little logs, its opening securely chained.

The pain in his heart had become duller with the passing months. And he

was sleeping much better—eating, too. Strange, how one's appetite improved in this high country.

He had spent weeks and much of his scant strength getting wood for the tiny iron stove in the cabin against the winter. An odd joy was beginning to burgeon in him, the joy of the human who has come back to the breast of nature and found help, who pits his soul against the universe. He began to think ahead further than the fall. The winter, now—there would be snow, deep snow. He had not seen snow for years. He would make himself a pair of snowshoes.

And then, suddenly, one soft late autumn night, winter came out of the north and was there—came with an unheard whisper of snow in the dark and he awoke late to gray shadows in the cabin.

That was a great snow. It lasted for four days straight on end and piled itself softly between the pines like a drift of angels' feathers. It covered the High Plateau and piled up in all the gulches, and the little low flats were lost in it.

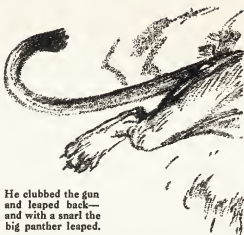
It was beautiful, and he reveled in it, going out a little way but finding its soft hindrance too much for his strength. So he watched it from his little window, content and smiling. The sun came out and the world of the lone mountains was another world entirely.

**T**HAT winter was to be the hardest the hills had known for many a year. If the man had been a little wiser he might have read the signs of it—the great activity of the squirrels in storing mast, the height from the ground at which they stored it, the early coming down of the deer from the higher country. These things he saw, some of them, but their significance was lost. He marveled at the deer, frequent little bands of them, all going down along the great slants toward the lowlands and the rivers. He had never seen one going up.

He made his snowshoes, clumsy things but adequate, and went for short trips on them, trips that lengthened as his strength seemed to grow.

The winter closed down hard and very quickly. It seemed never to let go its first firm grasp. It snowed and froze and snowed again, and there was nothing living to be seen except the squirrels which lived high in the great pines and came out in the frosty sunlight to chatter at the wide white world.

But though nothing living was to be seen, there was something in the Stone



He clubbed the gun and leaped back—and with a snarl the big panther leaped.

Ridge country, two somethings, in fact: Brush-tail still ran his long trails, hunting, and Slip-along watched him from this limb and that, hating. Neither the panther or the wolf had left the vicinity of High Plateau.

Down where the deer had gone there was a danger which they both knew and feared—man and his dogs. They had heard them both from far distances when they, in other hard years, had followed the deer. So now these two, old and wary as they were, stayed in their wilderness and took their chances on the stragglers which had been caught.

And always a few of the round-horns did get caught—to "yard" together in some glade, trampling the falling snow until they built for themselves a veritable prison of frozen walls which they could not scale, slowly starving as the winter held. There was one such "yard" over on Papoose and the wolf and the panther found it.

It contained a little herd of some twenty deer, mostly does and younglings, though there was one gallant old monarch who sold his life dearly—but the less said of that piteous affair the better. . . .

It had to do with Slip-along, who fed fat for many days. The two marauders took turns upon this mutual larder, knowing full well that this was not a time to air their ancient grievances. They killed, and ate their own kill, leaving each other's strictly alone, and they did not waste. They saw each other sometimes, from the yard's edge, but beyond burning eyes and raised hackles they kept their own distance. And the man saw them, too, at different times. For the wolf he had a sort of grim respect, a feeling of nearness which must





have come to him from his hairy ancestors who tamed the first wolf and brought it to his fire. For the cat he had a fear and a dread, deep in him and nameless of origin. There was something in that long, low-stretching body which chilled him to the bone.

November passed, and he made a great Thanksgiving spread. He gave thanks, too, out in his yard under the blue-white stars. December came in and held the world in a grasp of ice, of snow and silence and bitter, piercing cold. He filled his cabin with Christmas greens

and the pretty red berries of the toyon, and celebrated the twenty-fifth with many burning candles and more good things from his tins, with the reading of old choice tales and the playing over and over on his tiny phonograph of "Holy Night, Silent Night."

A strange Christmas, in all truth, but he was neither lonely or sad. And if he thought of the two who had betrayed him, he wished them well.

January came, and with it the last of the deer in the yard, who had eaten the bark and the very roots of the trees that grew in their prison, died of starvation before its enemies could kill it.



Those enemies had another fight over its bone-thin carcass, and nearly did for each other before they fell apart to nurse their wounds and take turns at the food.

And it was in the first week of February, when famine stalked them both, that the end of the long feud came in sight. The man, stronger than he had been for three years, was out on his snowshoes. These were new ones which he had made, lighter, narrower, and he could handle them in a fairly expert fashion, so that he was proud as he swung along over on the farther edge of High Plateau.

He had looked at the spring, still bubbling through its rimming ice,—and he thought how like the human soul it was, forever straining upward, never sinking to despair,—and had circled the southern edge of the high meadow, when he came upon something which stopped him in his tracks. This was a wide place in the latest snow where some terrific and deadly battle had taken place. It was thrashed and trampled, thick with dried blood.

A week old, those signs, he decided, bending to examine them. And then he straightened and his eyes widened as he looked about. There was wolf-sign there, and panther-sign. Wide, round, padded footprints with digging claws at every toe, narrower, dog-like prints. Gray hair in bunches, literally clawed out with the skin it grew on, scattered here and there. Not much tawny, short hair, but pools and pools of that dark stain which proved all too well how Brush-tail's slashing jaws had taken tribute. It had been a

vast fight and the man looked about for the bodies of the combatants but did not find them. There was nothing but the white stillness, the silence of the hushed hills. Slowly and carefully, the skin prickling on his body, he went on around the plateau.

And a little farther north he found what, somehow, he had known he would find. A tall gray form standing in a little open place, its legs braced out, its unspeakable head held up on its long thin throat as if it searched for something in the thin cold air. Brush-tail, standing still. Just standing.

THE man went carefully forward, stepping softly in the snow, but soft as he moved a little sound went with him and the wolf moved on his spread feet, jerked his head weakly a bit higher, his tattered ears lifting painfully. Strange, thought the man, that he did not turn, did not look at him. There was something terribly strained in his whole tense attitude, a pathetic waiting, listening.

And then the man saw—saw with a shock of horror. As he moved forward, he had come around a bit to the fore and Brush-tail's strained and waiting face was in his line of vision—a pinched, starved face, held up to the sky it could not see, for the gaunt old wolf was blind!

At last the balance of power had swung a bit and Slip-along had done for him with a final rake of that pawful of claws.

"Heavens!" said the man aloud and the wolf jumped.

"Steady!" the man whispered gently. "Steady, old man!"

At the sound Brush-tail leaped to fly in his old swift manner—and fell sprawling in the snow, a heap of shaking bones.

Without another word, another sound, the man turned and went as fast as he could back to the cabin—to the pailful of water, to the tins of good food. He filled a little bucket with hot water from his kettle and put in it the contents of a can of chicken soup. Then he went back around the meadow. Brush-tail was up again, standing in that braced, peculiar waiting, and the man spoke again, went near when he jumped and fell. He set the cooling broth close to the fierce old muzzle and watched the lips drool at the smell. He pushed it nearer—dipped it against Brush-tail's jaws—and the swollen tongue dipped painfully into the savory liquid. Slowly, painfully, it dipped again, the dry throat gulped and swallowed.

Now, Brush-tail was not a thing to stir sympathy in the human heart. He had lived by the law of death and he had been merciless in his adhesion to it. But he had not made the law. The man, looking on him with compassion, squatted on his haunches in the snow, thought of that.

And he came, somehow, to align himself on the wolf's side, to feel something of the bitter hate for Slip-along. It had been stirred in him anyway that first night when he had heard the big cat scream.

So he cast about for ways and means of saving the old king of the forests, and by nightfall, with the aid of ropes, his old snowshoes for a sled, and a cunning muzzle of cords for the swollen jaws, he had him home and in the tiny lean-to he had made for his kindling wood.

A hastily constructed fence across its open side was all sufficient to form a prison for the wolf, and the man wondered at himself that night beside his roaring stove. But he had a new interest, a keen, sharp one, and it made the days more vivid. Wonderful days they were, anyway, he thought, with the new strength that was building in him, the new beauty of his thought toward the world, toward those two in Singapore.

**B**RUSH-TAIL was on his feet again when he went to him in the morning but too weak to resist aught he did, weaving so that the man must hold him as he struggled to run and could not. Again there was the steady voice with its gentle cadences. Again there was the blessed drink that heartened. The day passed and the wolf stood for hours of it in the same place. The man made a bed for him of some empty sacks and pushed him over on it, feeding him once more. That waiting on his braced feet for the light to break that would never break, touched the man's heart. So the hours passed, and lengthened into days,—one of them, two, three, four. By the fifth Brush-tail no longer weaved. The food was telling. But he did something which delighted his benefactor—he turned his blank face toward the sound of his steps, thrust his muzzle toward the savory pan.

"Good boy!" the man said, chuckling. "We'll make it yet."

And just then from far across the deep white gulches there came the hunting cry of a panther,—a savage, high wail, desperate and wild,—Slip-along, famishing in the dead wilderness.

The hair on Brush-tail's back rose in a ridge and his lips slavered, twitched back from his fangs. There was in him a seeming of such helpless rage that the man fancied he understood.

"Steady," he said. "It's too late now, old man. The balance of power was against you. Must buck up."

He would not have touched the wolf then for a mint of money, for the animal was tensed to spring in every muscle.

But there was no further sound from across the gulch and quiet reigned presently in Brush-tail's despairing spirit.

**M**ORE days came and went. The broth gave place to solid food from the precious tins and the wolf began to fill out between the rack of ribs.

He took on returning strength, but though the man knew he could have walked in his narrow pen, he did not. Just stood. Waiting. Always waiting. He knew the man now as the one thing connected with food, knew his small meant relief from hunger, that his hands, too, often on his head, his ruffed shoulders, meant safety from famine.

And slowly, so slowly, he came to move toward him, careful step by careful step. The man was exultant, jubilant. He was accomplishing something. It was in the second week that Brush-tail found the man's thigh and suddenly leaned against it, holding still, bracing.

Wondering, the man took a step,—and Brush-tail stepped, carefully, feeling with his forefeet. And on that instant something was born between them, a tie was made. Two, three, four steps they went together across the little pen.

"Hoop la!" said the man. "That's it, is it? We go together, do we?" And that was it. If Brush-tail walked, he walked with his left shoulder leaning against the man's thigh from thence on. And walk they did, out of the pen, a little way across the tiny yard.

In the middle of the third week the man walked the wolf into the cabin—and his dog lay on the floor that night beside his bed, just as his hairy ancestors' wild wolf dogs had come in to their fires to lie beside their beds of skins.

They were friends, master and servant, understanding each other.

Barney the squirrel made much ado about the matter and moved his own bed from the bunk onto the highest shelf beside the coffee-can.

The man laughed and tickled his fat stomach.

"You may be right, at that," he said. "Suppose he's eaten many a juicy member of your tribe."

**B**UT if Brush-tail in his eternal night had fallen on good times, his ancient enemy, Slip-along, had not. Hunger stalked him daily.

Hunt as he might, he could not keep enough food in him to live fully. He found some rabbits frozen under a thin sheet of ice around a bush and they kept him up a week. Then he caught a squirrel by a streak of luck. But supply and demand were inadequately adjusted and the cat was slowly starving. His yellow eyes were clear and fiery, terrible in their ferocity. He would have tackled anything that confronted him, so desperate was he for food. He even took to creeping to the plateau's edge and watching the light in the cabin window, drawn by the smell of strange foods on the air.

February was colder than any month preceding it. The icy hand of the cold seemed to press down and squeeze the life from flesh and bone. But to the man it was life itself, health in its sharpest form.

He longed to be out in it. He had stayed close to the cabin because of Brush-tail who hung against him in his helplessness, but now he must go. So he went and Brush-tail went too, blundering so terribly against the closed door that the man relented and took him along. A strange sight they were, had there been one to see, for the wolf interfered with his snowshoe stride, and they went very slowly to look at the spring. It was still free of ice, moving on its sandy bottom. Something odd happened here: the blinded Brush-tail, sniffing, seemed to recognize the spot, for he put down his head and lapped of the familiar waters. Wonderful, the man thought, that keen unerring scent, and the hearing that caught such fine, far sounds.

That walk was the first of many, for they came to go daily as Brush-tail's strength came back. He had filled out, his wounds had healed. They went farther afield as they became accustomed to their odd mode of travel. . . .

And it was in the third week of February that the last act of the drama at High Plateau was played out, to an audience of silence, cold and shadows. The man and the wolf had been far that day. They had seen the patch, empty now, where the manzanita berries grew, had looked along the frozen stream for a pos-

sible hole where the trout might have survived, where the ice had not formed. A small accident had happened here, too, negligible in itself, but which had a tremendous bearing on what happened later. The man had bent to peer into one such deep hole, sullen but free of ice, where a big rock jutted over, and the rifle, laid on the rock, but on too sharp a slant, had slid end on into the pool. The water was deep and the man had quite a time recovering it with the aid of a loop of string on a crooked stick.

He dried it thoroughly with his handkerchief, shook his head at the wet shells in the magazine. The blue shadows of twilight were coming thick among the pines when they turned toward home, the man's hand on Brush-tail's head. Strange, he thought, how darkness had tamed this savage creature, old in his ways of life, had brought him, helpless, to man's knee. Once or twice the man halted to admire the snowy scene—and never knew that twenty yards behind him, to the left and down wind, a long and sinister shape was creeping, its belly close to the snow, its famished eyes glowing like fox-fire.

Slip-along had found a living thing at last!

He took no notice of his ancient foe, the wolf. It was as if he knew him to be helpless. Perhaps he did know it after that last battle. At any rate it was not Brush-tail whom he followed, but the man with his warm, sweet smell of flesh. Up a long slope they went, dipped into a darkening hollow, came out—and suddenly something, a shift of air perhaps, stopped the blind wolf in his tracks, jerked up his head. The man looked at him, startled, saw the hackles rising on his back, the lips curling from his fangs. Instantly, as if a word had been spoken, he knew. Even before his widening eyes flew round the shadowy world about, he knew that the danger he had heard—had *felt*—that long-ago night in the panther's first scream, was upon him.

And at the moment he dropped the rifle to position he saw it.

**S**LIP-ALONG, not twenty feet away, was already preparing for his spring, his hindquarters raised above his foreparts, his long tail moving, his hind feet marking time.

A fur of horror grew in the man's throat and he flung up the gun and fired. No report followed, no burst of flame, only an empty click—and he recalled the pool beneath the rock! He had

scant time for remembering, however. He clubbed the gun and leaped back—and with a snarl the panther rose in the air, forelegs spread to catch him, and sailed toward him. He struck and dodged, and the cat missed, sliding in the snow. But something else had happened in that awful flash of time. Brush-tail, his own paws spread, his mouth open, his blind face ghastly in its straining, had leaped toward the *smell* that was his enemy. Now he stood again beside the man, still, straining, while Slip-along turned, crouched, calculated, treading the snow again.

**D**ESPAIR was in the soul of the man. He knew their weakness, helplessness—a human with an empty gun, and a wolf that could not see! But there was courage in them both. Great courage. Such great courage that the man thrilled—as he had thrilled at his fight with a slower death.

"Atta boy!" he said, whispering, crouching, his club raised. "Atta boy!" And it seemed to him that something quivered in Brush-tail at his voice, that the tense body with its raised ruff tensed still more.

But there was no time to think. The panther yelled, terribly, furiously, and once again he saw its long form rise in the air, saw it come toward him horribly—and then he saw the dark form at his knee rise too, magnificent in its bulk, and leap toward that *sound* of coming death. At the very peak of their double arc they met—and fell together, a snarling, rolling, squirming ball of unspeakable fury.

Like a man stricken dumb, he stood and watched, his eyes dilated.

He knew instinctively that he was witnessing the last great battle, the final strife of these two old enemies, and that the odds were fairly even.

Brush-tail could not see, but he was strong with food. Slip-along could make the most of every faculty, but he was starvation-poor.

And so the beasts rolled and fought in the still twilight, two awful engines of destruction. The wolf had missed his instinctive grip at the first snap of their impact, the windpipe of the cat, but he had caught the throat at that, to one side, under the ear. He dared not fight as he had used to, namely, leap, slash, leap away. He might never get a grip again. Therefore he clamped his great jaws down and held—for his life and the man's life. But he could kick back—

glory, how he could kick back! His hind-legs were spread apart, his tail straight out and fluffed to twice its natural size, his back humped in a high arch to avoid the crawling, ripping hind feet of the panther. Blood was flowing from his shoulders. His face was covered with it. *But that was panther blood.* It was Slip-along's jugular that his monstrous jaws held—and those jaws were not still.

Over and over, this way and that, they went, clawing, tearing, the cat snarling with baffled rage, the wolf silent as death.

And as the man watched, fascinated, it seemed to him that he saw the balance of power slipping, slowly slipping, slowly. And that it slipped toward Brush-tail as he clung and tore and took the awful raking on his shoulders. Then he *knew* it was, for there was a momentary stillness, a renewal of fury, another period of stillness. Then a long stillness—with the panther's forelegs sliding slowly down the wolf's riddled sides—and it was done. For a long time after it was done Brush-tail still stood, holding his dead enemy under him in the crimson snow. When at last he was satisfied that there was no life in him, he loosed his grip, stood waiting, straining down toward the heap of sodden bones and skin, and finally stepped away two paces, to stand in panting silence as he must have stood that day when the balance of power had dipped toward the panther and left him done for, on the plateau's edge.

**F**OR a time the man waited, letting him get his bearings, letting the rage die out of him, the blood-lust settle.

Then he said softly: "Atta boy! Steady, old man!"

Carefully—for despite their weeks of intimacy, this was a wild wolf which had made a momentous kill—he approached, held out a tentative hand. He touched Brush-tail—and nothing happened.

Slowly, carefully, he moved beside him, leaned his thigh against the bleeding shoulder, took a step, one more. Slowly, his hair still up, his blind, victorious head high in the cold night air, Brush-tail leaned against him, moved beside him.

And together they went, slowly and painfully, up toward the sanctuary of the cabin, to rest and food and healing once again.

Fighters born, victorious against all odds, their lives justified by that thing in them both which did its best by life, they climbed their steep trails and asked no odds of any but each other.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE.

IT was while I was roaming the suk and coffee-houses of Omdurman some six months ago, in company with a Syrian attached to the Sudan Intelligence, that I first heard the story which I have made the basis of an adventure of the Red Wolf of Arabia.

I had studied the history of the Dervish campaign and that surprisingly successful empire built up by the Mahdi and in which General Gordon played a tragic rôle. A perhaps morbid curiosity led me to try and discover what had happened to the head of Gordon, from the moment when it had been unwrapped for the horrified gaze of Slatin Pasha, then a captive in the Mahdi's camp.

For a time Gordon's head was fixed to a tall spear and set up outside the Mahdi's tent. It is thought that the rest of the mangled body was flung into the Nile. No trace of it was ever found. Later the head of Gordon was paraded in triumph throughout the countryside. Then it was lost to history.

Yet a clever and interesting Arab dealer in gum who invited me into his house in Omdurman related to me the equally grim story of the other head in that drama of the African desert—the head of the Mahdi:

When, several years later, Kitchener and the British armies advanced upon the Dervishes and began the battle of Omdurman, shells from the artillery began to smash that elaborate tomb of the dead Mahdi built by one of his Italian prisoners. It is reported that when the British troops entered Omdurman, the body of the Mahdi was discovered uprooted by the shells. Commands were given that this body, which the natives still regarded with religious awe, should be scattered to the winds of the desert.

But according to the story told me, a British officer secured the head of the Mahdi, hid it in his baggage, and set off on leave for Europe. At Wadi Halfa, however, the affair was discovered. The officer was arrested, and commanded to take the head into the desert and bury it. This he dutifully did. Natives still believe that the head of the Mahdi of Allah lies in the sands of the Nubian Desert, and that some day this holy relic will appear again.

Such is the story I heard one night while the drums of Omdurman were thudding weirdly in the darkness.

—William J. Makin.

## A tremendous adventure of



# The Drums of

By WILLIAM

"HE had huge, ugly, flapping ears. And he knew he had them. He hated his ears. So he killed himself by tumbling in front of a Metro train. *Hélas!*"

The little fat man drowned his sigh with a choice liqueur.

"What is the moral to your sad tale, *cher ami?*" inquired Paul Rodgers.

The man who was known as the Red Wolf of Arabia sprawled at ease in a comfortable chair in the lounge of Shepherds' Hotel, in Cairo. A thin veil of cigarette-smoke shrouded his keen features; his gray eyes were half-closed; his lithe body rested with a suggestion of panther grace.

"The moral!" A pair of plump hands brushed aside the smoke-curtain. "I could have cured him. Yes, I, Doctor Henri Tobine, the greatest facial surgeon in Europe! Two little cuts on those flapping ears with my scalpel,—oh, so very little cuts,—and that miserable man would have walked out of my operating-room in Paris an optimist."

The Intelligence officer could not resist a smile at the enthusiasm of the podgy man facing him. They had met in a concert hall in Cairo; Beethoven's





Illustrated by  
John F. Clymer

# Omdurman

J. MAKIN

"Moonlight Sonata" had been played by a quartet, and Rodgers had found himself talking eagerly with the podgy Frenchman who had also been enthralled by the music. They were both staying at Shepherd's Hotel. It was natural that they should meet after dinner the next evening and sip liqueurs together.

"Face-lifting? A queer job, Doctor."

"Not at all, my friend," protested Henri Tobine. "A very necessary job, in our civilization. Consider, for example: You walk into a department-store to buy a pair of silk stockings."

"But I never do."

"*Ecoutez!* Every man does at some time in his life. You reach the counter; and there, waiting to serve you, is a girl with a badly shaped nose, queer eyes, or an ugly mouth. What do you do?"

"Be a gentleman, and forget it," smiled Red Rodgers.

The little surgeon snorted his disgust.

"If you were a Frenchman, or one to whom beauty appeals, you could not forget it. No, *mon ami*. You would be disgusted. You would walk away without buying that pair of silk stockings."

"Is this the latest salesmanship from Paris?"

"Call it so if you will," said the surgeon with a cherubic smile. "But it is that which has given me the wherewithal for a month's holiday in Cairo."

"How so?" inquired Rodgers.

"A certain department-store in Paris approached me sometime ago. The gentleman in charge lamented that they had the best working-girls in the whole of the city; but *ma foi*, they were also ugly. A comic journal had said so, and Paris had laughed. Would I, as the most famous of all plastic-surgeons, make these girls beautiful? There were forty-eight of them who needed treatment."

"Good heavens! What did you do?"

"I quoted a fee for the whole forty-eight," replied the surgeon blandly. "In two months the job was finished. The girls were beautiful, but I was slightly fatigued. I collected my fee and sailed for Egypt."

There was such an expression of content and self-approbation on the face of the fat man, that the Intelligence officer laughed aloud.

"But where is the humor, *mon ami*?" protested Doctor Tobine.

Rodgers sobered his countenance.

"A thousand pardons, Doctor. I had forgotten that old French proverb: *il faut souffrir pour être belle*."

"Quite right," nodded the Doctor, appeased. "But one need not suffer much these days to be beautiful. At least, not by an expert. If you had cuts on your face from a motor smash, I could remove the scars with my scalpel."

"In these parts," murmured Rodgers, "the Somalis deliberately make three cuts on each cheek because they believe it to be a sign of beauty and manhood."

"A barbarous custom," snorted Doctor Tobine. "Do you know, *mon ami*, that I have performed three thousand operations for wrinkles, and only after the five hundredth did I feel that I was becoming a master of my technique. Now a *femme du monde* can come to me, and in fifteen minutes I can subtract fifteen years from her looks."

"A miracle," agreed Rodgers idly. "But at least, Doctor, you would have no cause to perform any such operation on that creature who is now addressing herself to the hotel-porter. Beautiful, is she not?"

Doctor Tobine hurriedly adjusted a pince-nez that dangled from a broad black ribbon against his paunch, and stared at the woman indicated by Paul

Rodgers. At first he saw only a flame-colored evening frock out of which rose a shapely pair of white shoulders. Then she turned her head.

"Admirable," murmured the surgeon. "The nose a little tilted, perhaps."

"But giving her a pert, intelligent look," pointed out the Intelligence officer.

"The eyes they are dark, *hein?*"

"Violet in tint," said Rodgers, whose glance was keener.

"Then they match her dark hair, which under the light seems to have a purple tinge. And that neck, *ma foi!* So swanlike. It would entrance a sculptor."

"A worthy model for your Paris establishment," smiled Rodgers. "Why not secure her services, Doctor?"

"Alas, she is too beautiful," sighed Doctor Tobine. "My patients would never be satisfied in her presence."

And the pince-nez fell back to its comfortable resting-place.

Through the haze of his cigarette-smoke, Rodgers continued to eye the beauty. She was talking animatedly, yet commandingly, to that Swiss porter of Shephard's, Adolf the admirable: Adolf, who was never perturbed, who spoke every language like a diplomat, and who apparently never slept. Always he was behind his counter with a medley of orange-jerseyed messengers slithering into life at the crook of his finger.

Adolf accepted her commands with respect. The next moment the superb creature flaunted toward them. She moved with the grace of a mannequin and the superb aloofness of a duchess. As the flame-colored creation swished silkily within a few feet of him, Rodgers sensed a subtle perfume.

"Ah, I should be a very poor man," commented the surgeon cynically, "if she were not a woman in a thousand."

"In ten thousand," added Rodgers, with admiration rare for him.

AND then the vision was blotted out suddenly. Before their table bowed a military, red-faced figure incongruously wearing a fez and a monocle.

"Barrington Pasha!" murmured the Intelligence officer. "You blot out a vision like a black cloud. . . . And how are the criminals of Cairo?"

"Quiet for the moment," smiled the Chief of the Cairo Police. Rodgers introduced to the surgeon the man whom all criminals in and around the Suez

feared more than the jinn of the desert. Doctor Tobine rose and bowed with true French politeness.

"It is a great honor to meet the famous Barrington Pasha," he said with obvious respect.

"And I am desolated because I must take away our friend for the evening—*cet poil de carotte*," responded Barrington Pasha.

"But I'm enjoying myself, loafing," grimaced Rodgers.

"And I have a little affair to discuss," commanded Barrington Pasha.

Rodgers shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will," he said resignedly. Then, to Doctor Tobine: "*Au revoir, mon ami*. We will discuss the beauty of your Frankenstein scalp again."

"It is, to me, always a pleasure," replied the surgeon, wreathing his fat face in a smile.

BARRINGTON PASHA led his captive to another part of the lounge.

"That woman in the flame-colored frock," he began. "You noticed her?"

"Who could not help noticing her," said Rodgers. "Who is she?"

"A very dangerous woman."

"That is obvious."

"She has come to Egypt for some sinister purpose."

The monocle glittered in the light.

"What is the purpose?" asked the Intelligence officer quietly.

Barrington Pasha twisted his mouth.

"I wish I knew. It's because I don't know that I'm begging your assistance."

"Begging, eh?"

"Well, I know I can't command you, my dear fellow. But you are the only man I can depend upon to discover what mischief Anna Sokolovitch is up to."

"So that is her name—Anna Sokolovitch."

Barrington Pasha nodded.

"A Russian, and a good bolshevik. All the more dangerous because she was once an aristocrat. Beware, my dear Rodgers, the aristocrat turned communist. She's here for mischief, and not one of my agents have been able to discover her game."

"She might be here for a holiday, like most of these sun lizards who creep here from Europe," ventured Rodgers.

Barrington Pasha shook his head.

"She no longer belongs to that crowd. She works, my dear fellow, and is recognized as one of the cleverest agents of the G.P.U."

His monocle swiveled in the direction of the Red Wolf, and the suspicion of a smile crept across his face. The Chief of the Cairo Police realized only too well that he had aroused the curiosity of this strange adventurer of deserts and the Red Sea.

"Any chance of discovering her mission?" asked Rodgers idly.

Barrington Pasha answered equally carelessly.

"She's just asked Adolf to find her a trustworthy and discreet dragoman," he murmured. "She leaves Cairo tomorrow morning by air-liner, for Wadi Halfa. Afterward she goes farther south, to Khartoum."

"And the dragoman goes with her?"

"He goes with her."

"I see." Rodgers braced his shoulders instinctively. "Well, perhaps I may look into it. See you again, Barrington. *Au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir,*" chuckled Barrington to the figure receding from him. "And good hunting."

With a sigh of content he slid into a comfortable chair and beckoned to a waiter.

"Bring me a cigar and a brandy liqueur," he ordered.

Barrington Pasha considered he had achieved a good evening's work.

## CHAPTER II

THE woman in the flame-colored frock, a long cigarette-holder jutting from her carmined lips, regarded the gayly garbed dragoman before her with a keen scrutiny of her violet eyes.

"Your references are excellent, Abdul Bahri," she said in French, flicking a little packet of papers toward him. "And Adolf the porter has enthusiasm about you."

"Adolf is generous," murmured the dragoman, stretching out a brown hand from beneath his gayly brocaded *kustan* to take the papers.

"But,"—and the violet eyes narrowed in their scrutiny,—"the dragoman I want must be a very special dragoman."

"That is why I offer myself, lady," replied Abdul Bahri with a logical simplicity.

Anna Sokolovitch did not smile.

"You speak English?" she asked suddenly.

"Naturally," replied the dragoman. "It is part of my trade. But—"

He hesitated. The woman waited.

"Well?" she asked.

The dragoman flung out his brown hands in a typical gesture.

"I prefer to speak French," he replied. "I like not the English people."

"So!"

"No true Egyptian welcomes the yoke that the English have placed on our shoulders," he went on slowly.

"But the yoke is there," she said, blowing a little cloud of smoke into his face.

"*Aiee!*" he agreed. "But some day Allah will help us, and the yoke will be removed. Until that day we wait patiently."

WITH a bow, the dragoman made as if to leave.

"I am sorry, lady," he added, "that I am not found suitable. I let my feelings show themselves. So I will bid you good night and wish that you may find the dragoman of your desires."

"Stay!" Her sure commanding voice halted the figure in the gaudy *kustan*. "I am not displeased with your speech. Come closer, Abdul Bahri."

The red slippers of the dragoman padded across the heavy rugs, and he stood in the center of the room while those violet eyes regarded him. She stretched out a slim white hand, on which a solitary flamelike jewel glistened, and touched the fez of the dragoman.

"It is strange," she said slowly, "to meet a dragoman in Cairo with red hair."

"There are many of us in Egypt, elect of Allah, who are so favored," was the quiet reply.

"You have a ready tongue," she said.

"But only for the gossip of the bazaar," he replied boldly. "Secrets die in my throat."

For fully half a minute he endured her close scrutiny. Those dark eyes seemed to pierce his brown skin and see deep down into the heart of him. But whatever she saw seemed to amuse her, for a faint smile crossed her carmined lips.

"You are engaged, Abdul," she said softly. "Be prepared to leave here at seven o'clock in the morning. We fly to Wadi Halfa."

"Certainly, lady. I will bring your tea at six o'clock."

"That will be excellent." She stifled a yawn and stretched her pantherlike body. "Good night, Abdul."

"Good night, lady, and pleasant dreams."

He shuffled with a final bow out of the room. Once in the corridor of the hotel, he unrolled a piece of sacking and stretched it before the door. He removed his fez, and placed it delicately on the floor. Then with a quick agile movement he rolled himself in the sacking, and couched against the door.

In five minutes he was fast asleep, a strange smile on his face.

### CHAPTER III

THE big air-liner left the ground, banked majestically over Heliopolis, and with a steady *crunch-crunch* of the four engines headed south through the opaque air of the early morning. There were six passengers in the machine, all Europeans with the exception of the dragoman in the gaudy *kufan* who sat behind Anna Sokolovitch.

Garbed in a soft pearl-gray dress, the Russian woman seemed cool and more mysteriously detached than ever. She stared indifferently through the cabin windows at the Pyramids below. From this height of two thousand feet they appeared like hillocks of sand built playfully by children out of the desert.

Paul Rodgers stroked the back of his head, characteristically, and adjusted the angle of his fez. So far, he was completely baffled. During the process of preparing light baggage for the airplane journey, he had combed the Russian woman's belongings and found nothing more damning than an array of perfume bottles and a lavish collection of frocks. Perhaps the one peculiarity was an empty hat-box. He had put it aside with the baggage which was to be left at Shepheard's Hotel, but Anna Sokolovitch had pounced upon it.

"I thought I told you that this *must* go in the airplane with me?" she had said sharply, menacingly.

"Yes, lady; but it is empty," protested the dragoman.

"Exactly. Like your head, Abdul Bahri." Her voice was dangerously quiet. "See that the hat-box is placed in the cabin of the airplane. And remember in future, Abdul, that my commands are to be obeyed."

"Yes, lady."

Five minutes later he was examining that hat-box, running his thin brown fingers over it to discover whether anything was secreted in the lining. There was nothing. Just an ordinary empty

hat-box that could be purchased for thirty piasters anywhere in Cairo.

"And now help fasten my frock, Abdul."

She had called impatiently over her shoulder. Paul Rodgers padded back into the room at the hotel, and the thin brown fingers fumbled with the fastenings of her dress. Mentally he cursed Barrington Pasha for suggesting the rôle of dragoman. But it was too late to attempt anything else.

For a moment their eyes met in the mirror before which she was standing. Violet stared into gray—a steady scrutiny. The Intelligence officer drooped his lids. He heard her soft laugh.

"For a Moslem, you seem very ignorant of a woman's dress, Abdul."

He had replied adroitly:

"Our women dress differently, lady."

The four engines crunching their way rhythmically through the desert air lulled his mind. It was music devoid of counterpoint, a pure symphony of power. Below he could see the Nile, a broad steel ribbon bordered with green. On either side stretched illimitable desert, losing itself in the shimmering sunlight. And just in front of him was a figure in a pearl-gray dress, sitting alongside an empty hat-box.

AT Assuit the air-liner descended for half an hour. A light breakfast was served in a marquee on the *aérodrome*. Then once again the machine climbed, slitting the blue envelope of the sky with its shattering drone, and headed across the desert.

The rarefied air caused the air-liner to bump about alarmingly. The pilot sent the machine up another thousand feet. Below was sheer desolation. Black hills looking like charred mounds rose out of the gray sea of sand. The sun seemed to have blistered all life out of existence.

The bumping caused more than one face among the passengers to assume the gray color of the desert. But it did not disturb Anna Sokolovitch. Just as they were approaching Luxor and the Nile once again, she twisted round in her seat and regarded the dragoman behind.

"Abdul!"

"Yes, lady."

"Have you ever flown before?"

With memories of many desert flights, Rodgers grinned within. But he lied easily: "No, lady."

"Are you frightened?"

"I prefer camels, lady. For the rest, it is with Allah."

And the laughter which reached his ears above the drone of the engines told him that his disguise was still convincing.

They swooped down on Aswan, the half-throttled engines spluttering as they crossed the gigantic dam and the almost submerged Temple of Philæ. There they lunched. An hour later they were on the last stage of the day's journey along the Nile, over the First Cataract, and on to the gateway of the Sudan—Wadi Halfa. And always the empty hat-box reposed at the side of the mysteriously aloof Anna Sokolovitch.

At the end of that day of monotonous droning rhythm, of flying over drab desert or apparently endless ribbon of the Nile, Rodgers was tempted to send a telegram to Barrington Pasha suggesting that the Cairo police should stop harrying an innocent tourist. But as they were entering the doorway of the white painted hotel set among a garden of palms, Anna Sokolovitch turned to her dragoman.

"After dinner, Abdul, I shall require a car to drive into the desert."

"Yes, lady. And for how long?"

"Probably for the whole night."

"Will you require me, lady?"

"Of course. Oh, and don't forget to bring that empty hat-box in the car."

The dragoman bowed. Decidedly this Russian woman, who wanted to spend a night in the desert with an empty hat-box, was an unusual type of tourist.

Swathed in a white silk cloak that made her appear a figure in alabaster, Anna Sokolovitch took her place in the limousine which the dragoman had conjured out of the little town of Wadi Halfa.

"First to the *suk*," she commanded.

"I want the house of El Kawa, the grain-merchant."

"There is only one El Kawa in Halfa," murmured the Arab chauffeur respectfully. "He is rich and powerful. But after sundown his house is closed to all visitors."

The murmur was in Arabic, and meant only for the dragoman, who was seated beside the chauffeur. The Russian woman heard it, however, and understood. She replied in Arabic:

"El Kawa expects me. Drive there quickly!"

And her slim hand rested upon the empty hat-box on the seat beside her.



"I thought I told you this hat-box must go in the airplane with me?" she said sharply.

The limousine swung away from the brightly lighted hotel, and in a few minutes had entered the narrow streets of the *suk*, or bazaar. Into these streets the desert had overflowed, a gritty yellow flood that lapped against dark doorways. Oil lamps burned smokily in strange interiors. Goats scuttered about restlessly. The monotonous cadence of a dancing girl's song was caught for a moment by the limousine in passing, and then lost in the rumble of the exhaust.

The chauffeur applied his brakes outside a tall house built of sun-baked mud and stones, graced with a crazy balcony and displaying fretted Arabic windows.

"The house of El Kawa," he said.

Red Rodgers the dragoman stepped out. At a sign from the woman he opened the door of the limousine and assisted her into the sand.

"I will knock," she said quietly.

Her white hand tapped against the door four times. Almost instantly the portal swung open, and a coal-black Sudanese, who in the darkness with his long white garment gave the appearance of a decapitated monk, growled a welcome.

"Enter, lady from the snows. The master awaits you."

She plunged into a dark passage, Red Rodgers padding after her. They were shown into a heavily carpeted room where one dangling oil lamp threw their giant shadows against the bare walls. Simultaneously a wizened old man with a gray beard brushing against his gay coat also entered the room. He bowed low to the Russian woman.

"Welcome, Anna Sokolovitch. You come at the very hour of the moon as you promised."

"As I promised, El Kawa," she replied. "I plan, and the plan moves and takes shape, just as the Holy Prophet Mahomet planned and eventually took Mecca."

"Allah is great. And Mahomet is his prophet," murmured the old man mechanically. His rheumy eyes had swiveled toward Rodgers. "But who is this *effendi*?"

"My dragoman, Abdul. And a hater of the English," smiled the woman. "He knows not of the plan; yet he is a faithful son of Allah."

"*Allah O akbar!*" intoned the Red Wolf, feeling that the short silence necessitated it.

IT was in that same silence that the gay coat worn by the wizened old man had stirred his memory. At first he had thought of the cynical magician who stirred the dolls to life in Stravinsky's famous ballet "*Petrouchka*." Then he recalled the bloody history of these deserts. The gay coat was the color-patched *jibba* once worn by thousands who followed that mad fanatic of the desert calling himself the Mahdi of Allah.

The frenzied thousands in their patched *jibbas* had stormed Khartoum, and killed its defender General Gordon, after one of the most desperate sieges in history. Years later those same patched *jibbas* had, once more by their thousands, launched themselves in a mad charge against the heavy artillery of Kitchener and his army outside Omdurman. And for miles the sands had been strewn with their torn and maimed bodies, the night wind stirring the *jibbas* until it seemed that the whole desert heaved beneath a gay patchwork quilt.

Now, thirty-five years after that devastating defeat at Omdurman, an old man in the *suk* of Wadi Halfa dared to wear the *jibba*.

"All faithful ones are welcome to this house," purred El Kawa, removing his gaze from Red Rodgers.

"Are the diggers ready?" asked Anna Sokolovitch quietly.

"*Aiee!* My own son is one of them," nodded the old man. He clapped his hands softly.

Two young Arabs, young enough not to have beards on their chins, padded into the room. They each carried a short desert spade like those used by the tomb-diggers of Egypt.

"Good," approved the Russian woman, with one glance at them. "And now let us motor into the desert. There is much work to be done before the dawn."

"It is holy work," muttered the old man. "May Allah look down and bring you success!"

Anna Sokolovitch seemed impatient to be away. The two young Arabs with their spades were hustled into the waiting limousine. The dragoman found himself seated at the back alongside the Russian woman. And on her knees she nursed that empty hat-box.

As they lurched away into the desert, the Intelligence officer tried desperately to sort out this jigsaw of impressions. They rather resembled the crazy patchwork pattern of that *jibba* worn by the old man. He gave a side-glance to the beautiful woman at his side. In that white silk cloak she seemed enveloped in something unearthly, detached from the mundane world. And yet she was going into the desert with a hat-box! The absurdity of the adventure almost caused him to laugh aloud.

But the alabaster figure had leaned forward and was whispering instructions in Arabic to the driver. The limousine was plunging into the desert as into a yellow sea. It lurched from side to side as though heavy waves of sand flung it into a trough. The headlights cut the darkness and revealed more advancing waves of the desert. But always when the driver hesitated and gave a backward glance, the woman urged him on. "On! Still farther!"

The tires slid against the sand, and the engine raced desperately. But always they went farther into that empty darkness.

AFTER an hour of this lurching, rack-eting journey, Anna Sokolovitch gave the command:

"Stop! We must be near the place. Out of the car, all of you! Abdul, take charge of the hat-box."

Rodgers stumbled into the desert, the hat-box held in his lean brown hands.



He shivered slightly as the biting wind came stirring the sand at his feet. Overhead were a myriad bright stars. Shafts of light from the car lamps made ghostly the waste of sand beyond.

Anna Sokolovitch sat on the running-board. With an electric torch she bent over a roughly drawn map which she brought from the folds of her cloak. Beside her was a pocket-compass, gleaming in the darkness. This she also consulted.

A few moments later she stood up, and solemnly paced ten steps. Then once again she consulted the map and compass. Rodgers waited expectantly. The old fox Barrington Pasha was right, after all. This Russian woman was no mere tourist. But for what was she searching? Treasure?

"Dig here!" her voice suddenly commanded in the darkness.

The two Arabs with their spades hurried forward.

THE engine of the car had been switched off. A blanket of silence was over the desert, broken only by the thudding of the spades. One of the diggers had brought an oil lamp, and by its flickering gleam spadefuls of sand were thrown aside. The scene had a ghoully air. Rodgers narrowed his eyes as the thought crept into his mind: Were they digging for a body?

For two hours the digging continued. All the time Anna Sokolovitch, cigarette after cigarette gleaming against her pale face in the darkness, sat in aloof silence, swathed in her white silk cloak. She looked ghostly, a mysterious wraith in the fitful gleam of the oil lamp.

One of the diggers growled something. He dropped his spade and strode over to where the Russian woman was sitting. His face and arms were beaded with sweat.

"Nothing yet, lady," he pleaded in Arabic. "We must rest awhile."

She took the cigarette from her lips.

"There is no time to lose," she said. "Abdul, take the spade. Let the chauffeur also take a spade. And dig, dig hard. Dig a trench toward me."

"Certainly, lady," replied Rodgers, slipping out of his *kufian*. "And for what are we digging?"

"That which you find will explain itself," she replied enigmatically. "Get to work!"

The dragoman and the chauffeur took the places of the two young Arabs. As

he bent to his task, shoveling sand from a long trench, the Intelligence officer wondered again at the madness of the task. They might have been four men and a woman trying to move the Nubian Desert, for all the effect the thudding spades had.

After an hour he removed another garment. The lamp was replenished. As its gleam lit up his slim athletic body bent over the trench in the sand, he was conscious that the ghostly figure in the white cloak was regarding him with interest. He could only sense those violet eyes in the darkness. But their gaze was upon him.

At the end of the second hour the chauffeur groaned and collapsed. Rodgers turned. He saw that the two Arabs were lying prone, resting.

"Kick them awake and make them dig!" came a soft low voice in the darkness. "And hurry! In two hours it will be daylight!"

A note of anxiety had crept into her voice. Once again she flashed the electric torch and pored over the map. Then she straightened herself and walked to a queer-shaped boulder which had been the landmark for stopping the limousine. Once again with a compass she measured ten paces and stopped two yards from where they had been digging.

"Try this place," she commanded the two young Arabs. "And dig deep."

Rested by their two hours in the sand, the Arabs began again with furious determination. Rodgers slipped back into his *kufian* and stretched his weary limbs in Arab-fashion on the cold sands.

"You are tired, Abdul?" came her voice caressingly.

"A little, lady," he murmured.

"You have earned your rest," she said; and to his surprise, he found that her slim hands were stretching a rug over his body. She bent over him, and for a moment he was acutely conscious of that exquisite perfume, and of the violet eyes staring into his. Then she was back again at the diggers, lashing them to renewed efforts with her tongue.

JUST as a gray tint appeared on the horizon, the gray of a dying man's face, one of the Arab diggers gave a yelp. It was followed by a change in the sound of the thudding spade. Something other than sand had been struck. The sound aroused Rodgers. He flung aside the rug, raised himself and struggled forward.



Already Anna Sokolovitch was there. The two Arabs had flung aside their spades and were digging with their hands like eager dogs at a hole. Their fingers grasped something, tugged, and after a straining effort brought forth a small wooden box out of the hole. Then it must be treasure! Rodgers recognized the box as the type used for many years by the British Army for carrying rifle-cartridges.

"Stand back!" commanded Anna Sokolovitch.

She jumped into the hole. A knife was in her hand. She slipped it beneath the lid of the box, and pried it open. The Red Wolf craned forward, but in that dim dawn he could see nothing.

"Abdul! The hat-box!"

He hastened to obey. Her white hand came out of the darkness and grasped it. Then, as she bent down and dived both her hands into the wooden ammuni-

tion-box they had discovered, both the young Arabs let out a howl of religious exaltation and fell upon their faces.

"*Allah O akbar.* God is great!"

In astonishment Paul Rodgers twisted round to look at them. When he turned again, Anna Sokolovitch was stepping out of the hole, the hat-box in her hands.

"Wake the chauffeur, and let us drive back to the hotel at once," she commanded. . . .

Three minutes later they were jolting back in the direction of Wadi Halfa. The Russian woman nursed the hat-box on her knees, and in the rosy flush of the rising sun, her eyes gleamed like those of a girl in love. Red Rodgers sat at her



Within two days we must go even farther south, to Omdurman."

"Omdurman!"

Red Rodgers was again surprised. What business had Anna Sokolovitch in the city where once that fanatical Mahdi had ruled relentlessly the thousands of holy dervishes! But his exclamation brought no reply. The Russian woman had fluttered past him, carrying the hat-box in her hands.

He gave his instructions to the chauffeur. Before they left, he tried to engage the young Arabs in conversation.



Just as dawn appeared on the horizon, one of the diggers gave a yelp. The sound aroused Rodgers—but already Anna Sokolovitch was there.

side, but she did not speak until the car reached the hotel, and a yawning servant stared at them in surprise.

"Tell the chauffeur to take the two Arabs back to the house of El Kawa. Let them report to the old man that all is well, and the plan moves. For yourself, Abdul, go to your bed and rest.

"A good night's work," he ventured.

"Holy work," they replied. "And Allah has performed a miracle."

Then their mouths closed, and as the limousine hurtled away, they began intoning endlessly the Beautiful Names, the exalted Attributes, in the Arabic of the Holy Koran:

*"Er Rahman, er Rahim, el Kerim, el Halim, el Bassir—"*

The rest was lost in the splutter of the exhaust.

Tired and baffled, the Intelligence officer trod wearily along the corridor of the hotel. He slipped off his shoes and padded silently in his bare feet.

Then he stopped, holding his breath. He had reached the room of the Russian woman, and the door was slightly ajar. There was a tense silence. Rodgers slowly pushed the door open. What he saw froze him into statuesque horror.

Anna Sokolovitch was seated before her mirror. The hat-box was open. In her slim white hands she held the Thing that had been dug out of the desert. It was a head, the mummified head of an Arab. The sand had preserved the cruel brown features, the sensual droop of the eyelids, the sloping brow of the fanatic.

The Russian woman was crooning soft words to the head that she held in her hands. To the petrified Paul Rodgers it was a glimpse of a modern Salomé with the decapitated head of John the Baptist delivered to her after the dance of the Seven Veils. But whose head was it?

**E**VEN as he gazed, the excited violet eyes caught his in the mirror. She did not turn, but held up the monstrous Thing that he might better see it.

"Look at it, Abdul, and go down on your knees like a good Moslem. This is the head of the greatest of all followers of Mahomet, the Mahdi of Allah, who led the dervishes to a great empire."

"The Mahdi of Allah!" muttered Red Rodgers. "But lady, his tomb was shelled by the British, and his body scattered to the desert vultures."

"That is so," she said, still staring at him in the mirror. "The body was scattered, except the head. Have you not heard the story, Abdul? The head was secreted by a young British officer in an ammunition-box. He wished to display it to the curious in Europe. But on his way by train to Cairo the secret of the ammunition-box was discovered. The British officer got no further than Wadi Halfa. Here he was arrested, and ordered to take the head into the desert and bury it. He did as he was commanded. Some hours later he returned to Wadi Halfa without the head—but not before he had drawn a rough map of the place where he had buried this holy symbol of dervish triumph."

"And you have found the head again, lady!" exclaimed the Red Wolf.

"Yes, I secured this map, and the great secret, after a night of wine and dancing with an old fool on the Riviera."

"And what now?"

"It goes with me to Omdurman, to be shown to the thousands who still wait for a sign from Allah before rising in their fury to sweep the hated British out of their desert lands."

"A dangerous plan, lady."

"Life is only worth while because of danger," she exulted.

**T**HEN, as though she realized she had said too much, her eyes lost their frenzied excitement. Something like a gleam of fear came into them. The drooping eyelids of the withered head she still held in her hands were expressionless. But Rodgers himself felt that his own eyes had blazed through the mask of the dragoman Abdul.

Softly he closed the door and padded away.

An hour later he was bent over the pages of a book which he had found in the small library belonging to the hotel. It was the story of that Austrian, Slatin Pasha, who had been a captive of the Mahdi for many years. And it told, graphically, of another head, the lost head of General Gordon, the defender of Khartoum.

On the night that Khartoum was attacked by the forces of the Mahdi, Slatin lay a captive in a tent near Omdurman. As the guns crashed and the thousands shrieked their frenzy to Allah, the tumult swept back across the Nile. A negro, Shatta, came toward the tent of Slatin, carrying something in his grasp, a dripping bundle, a bloody cloth.

Slatin's heart stood still. The negro removed the cloth, and a bloody head appeared, with snow-white hair and side-whiskers—Gordon's head. The blue eyes were open; the mouth was smiling peacefully.

"Is that the head of your uncle, the unbeliever?" asked the negro Shatta.

Slatin answered at once: "He was a brave soldier, and he is happy now that he has fallen!"

That was the story of the other head in this great tragedy. The head of Gordon, carried on a spear for days, and then lost to history. Another head! An idea struck the pretended dragoman who thumbed the pages of this book.

"Two heads are better than one!" he murmured.

He walked out of the hotel into the sunshine of the morning. Half an hour later he was writing a telegram to be sent to Cairo. But it was not to Bar-

ington Pasha. It was addressed to Doctor Henri Tobine at Shepherd's Hotel, and read:

COME TO KHARTOUM BY PLANE AT ONCE  
BRINGING YOUR SCALPEL. URGENT CASE.  
GENEROUS FEE AND EXPENSES.

PAUL RODGERS.

"If I know the Doctor he won't be able to resist," murmured Rodgers with a smile.

The drums of Omdurman were sounding. A few tourists dining in the spacious room of the Grand Hotel heard the thudding sound as it came across that waste of waters where the Blue Nile and the White Nile meet. Khartoum was quiet. After a sultry day the guests of the Grand Hotel were lazily indifferent to happenings in the native city of Omdurman across the waters.

At the palace, the Governor General of the Sudan, Sir Michael Fyfe, was giving a small but elaborate dinner-party in honor of a visiting politician from England. The politician, who was displaying more interest in the wine-cellar of the palace than the problems of the Sudan, was blissfully happy.

"How romantic those drums sound in the distance!" remarked the politician's wife gushingly. "Do you think they are in our honor, Sir Michael?"

"Let us hope so," replied the Governor General laconically.

HE had been disturbed by several strange reports that had been placed before him by the Chief of Intelligence. *Jibbas* had been seen worn in the streets of Omdurman. Crowds had been gathering at the ruined tomb of Mahdi. And now the drums were thundering a frenzied summons to the faithful all over the Sudan. The echo of those drums would be heard in the sandy wastes of the Nubian Desert, in the black swamps of the Sud, and even as far away as the mountain border of Abyssinia. The faithful millions would be listening; and Sir Michael Fyfe would be glad when the dinner-party ended and the reports of his agents drifting among the crowds of Omdurman were brought to him.

"Try this liqueur brandy," he suggested to the politician. "It's 'eighty-five vintage."

"Thanks. I will."

"And after dinner, Sir Michael," gushed the politician's wife, "will you show us the spot behind the Palace where General Gordon was killed? I think that story is so romantic."

"It will be a pleasure," murmured the Governor General.

The dinner proceeded with official decorum.

Across the black waste of waters which were the two Niles, crowds were gathering in that spacious dusty square where the shattered remains of the Mahdi's tomb still stood. There was a time when all the slave-trails of Africa led to Omdurman. Something of the dusky African *mélange* could be seen in the crowd gathering on that night.

COAL-BLACK Nubians rubbed shoulders with lithe coffee-colored Arabs. Long-legged Shilluks from the swamps stalked among wild fuzzy-haired Nuers. Old slave-raiders from Kordofan stroked their beards while standing alongside the blood-drinking Dinkas. And showing in the flickering torches and lamps carried by many were the color-patched *jibbas* hidden so long by the dervishes. The cosmopolitan crowd jostled and scrambled in the huge square. Soon all were swaying, moved by one recurring rhythm, the thudding of the drums.

Within the holy tomb, facing this black and brown mass, was a little group of figures. Startlingly prominent was a beautiful white woman wearing a flame-colored evening gown. Her white shoulders gleamed; her violet eyes were ablaze. Her lips were parted, and a stream of eloquent Arabic came forth.

"Tomorrow is the dawn of a new day for the faithful," she cried. "The hated Englishman, the cursed *effendi*, will be driven out into the desert where the vultures will take their fill. It has been prophesied that Allah's kingdom shall again stretch across the earth."

"Allah is merciful!"

"Allah is great!"

"Allah is all-powerful!" droned the crowd.

"And to inspire you in this holy war," went on Anna Sokolovitch, "Allah has performed one of his miracles. I have been chosen to bring back to you, to bring back to this holy place, the head of the great descendant of the Prophet—the Mahdi of Allah."

"The Mahdi of Allah!" The news shrilled through the black mass of natives. "A miracle indeed!"

The Russian woman had paused. She knew well the dramatic effect of this short silence. There was a smile of triumph on her beautiful face, and she glanced sidewise at the dragoman in the

gaudy *kuftan* and the red fez who stood at her side. Moslem priests were bowed among the ruins of the tomb, chanting praises from the Koran. The crowd also chanted in unison.

Anna Sokolovitch held up her hand.

"It was the Mahdi of Allah who stormed and captured Khartoum. Your fathers, O faithful ones, were his warriors. Tonight you can follow in their footsteps. Khartoum awaits a conqueror. The city is yours to take. Are you true sons of your brave fathers?"

"Lead us to the attack!" cried the crowd.

The violet eyes were drunk with power.

"The head of the Mahdi of Allah shall lead you," she went on.

"*Aiee!* Show us the head."

Anna Sokolovitch made a gesture to the dragoman. He bent down and held forth in his hands the hat-box from Cairo.

The Russian woman raised both her white arms to command silence. In that flame-colored frock, which seemed to blaze in the torchlight, her blue-black hair streaked by the night wind, she was indeed a superb figure, a prophetic come to Omdurman.

"Before I show you the head of Allah's holy one," she cried, "I am going to give you a blood-sacrifice. It is a sacrifice that will bring you victory. Here in this sacred tomb despoiled by the British, let us sprinkle the ruins with the blood of an enemy in our midst."

"An enemy in our midst!"

The words sent an uneasy thrill through the crowd. Even the drums seemed to rumble into a menacing mutter.

"Who is the enemy?" cried a priest.

Anna Sokolovitch pointed a finger in the direction of the dragoman.

"Here is the enemy. A snake in the desert; Paul Rodgers, known as the Red Wolf of Arabia! Look upon him for yourselves."

With a contemptuous gesture her hand knocked away the red fez. The flaming crop of Red Rodgers was revealed. And the mutter that passed through the crowd told that his adventures were not unknown in the *suk* of Omdurman.

"He was sent by the English to spy out my plans, but he discovered them







"Look, faithful ones, upon the head of your leader to victory!" she cried, and displayed the withered head.

too late. And I penetrated his disguise. What is the penalty for a spy?"

"Death!" shrieked the crowd.

A dozen knives flashed forth. Paul Rodgers faced them. Except for a slight tightening of the muscles, a tense attitude, he showed no surprise. The violet eyes gazed at him wickedly.

"And I shall look upon your head, Paul Rodgers," she said in French, "as I looked upon the head of the Mahdi of Allah in my room at the hotel of Wadi Halfa. A head for a head, *hein*?"

HER white hands tore open the hat-box and dived within.

"Look, faithful ones, upon the head of your leader to victory!" she cried, and displayed the withered head in the gleam of a hundred torches.

A murmur, a shout—and then screams of fear! It was as though that black and brown mass shuddered at the head which was displayed before them. Even the knives that had flashed before Paul Rodgers dropped back. For the head held by the woman was not that of the Mahdi of Allah.

Sensing the thrill of fear which had passed through the crowd, Anna Sokolovitch gazed up at the Thing she held in her hand. It was the head of a European, with snow-white hair and side-whiskers—Gordon's head.

"Gordon Pasha!"

It was a shout of fear from the crowd. And there was an instinctive turning of backs when the dragoman stooped down, retrieved his fez, and calmly placed it on the snow-white hair of the head held by Anna Sokolovitch.

"*Aiee!* You foolish ones!" he shouted in Arabic. "It is the head of Gordon Pasha which still watches you and demands vengeance for your butchery. Beware, you rabble of Omdurman!"

There was a scream of terror from the Russian woman. She dropped the head to the ground. Another scream, and then she slid in a faint after that awful head. Rodgers caught her in his arms.

At the same moment shrill whistles came from the darkness. Suddenly the square was criss-crossed with shafts of light. They showed the egg-shell whites of terrified eyes transfixed by what they saw.

Five searchlights from armored cars flooded the square. Behind the lights the muzzles of machine-guns pointed dangerously at the brown and black masses. And like a voice of thunder or-

ders in Arabic came through a megaphone.

"All to your homes! Anyone found in this square within five minutes will be shot. To your houses!"

There was a scutter of thousands of naked feet in the dust. A black avalanche poured out of the square. The dark streets of Omdurman saw slinking figures going like rats to their holes. The drums ceased. Relentlessly those lights criss-crossed, searching the huge square until the last of the mob had disappeared.

Only a gaudily garbed dragoman holding the body of a woman in a flame-colored frock remained. . . .

Away across the waters, in the Palace at Khartoum, the Governor General, Sir Michael Fyfe, was showing the wife of the politician the spot where Gordon fell.

"Thank heaven, that sort of trouble isn't likely to happen again!" yawned the politician.

At that moment the drums of Omdurman ceased. The Governor General saw a single searchlight pointing to the sky. It was the signal he had hoped for and waited.

"No, thank heaven!" agreed Sir Michael.

AT the aërodrome at Khartoum, Paul Rodgers was shaking hands with the famous plastic surgeon Dr. Henri Tobine, who was returning by plane to Cairo.

"A strange operation which you asked me to perform, *mon ami*," said the little fat man with the cherubic smile. "But I hope it was satisfactory."

"Very," replied the Intelligence officer. "You are the one man in the world who could have done it. The resemblance was startling. It almost convinced me that it was the head of General Gordon. And you may have the satisfaction of knowing that your face-lifting saved my life."

The surgeon chuckled.

"But before I go, *mon ami*," he pleaded, "there are two things I should like to know."

"Yes?"

"Whose head was it that you asked me to work upon and make like the photograph of the great General Gordon?"

"I hate to libel the medical profession, *cher ami*," replied Rodgers, "but it was a surgeon at the hospital in Khartoum who provided me with the head of a European suicide who had chosen to be

decapitated by a train rather than endure this life. Poor devil! His remains served his country like a true patriot."

"And now for the second question: Where is the mummified head of the Mahdi of Allah?"

Rodgers shook his head.

"That, *cher ami*, must be my own secret. Let it be sufficient to say that it is resting somewhere in the great desert again. And I have not drawn a map of the locality. . . . So good-by, and a thousand thanks."

"SOME day you must visit me in Paris," smiled Doctor Tobine. "You may need my scalpel. Do you know what I am studying now?"

"No."

"How to change the color of the hair by surgical operation."

Red Rodgers laughed.

"Thank you, but I prefer my own as it is."

They took leave of each other with Gallic bows. Then Rodgers walked over to another passenger who was proceeding to Cairo by the air-liner. It was a woman dressed in a pearl-gray frock.

"Good-by, Anna Sokolovitch," he said quietly.

Violet eyes in which the luster had been dimmed, regarded him. Something like a wry smile twisted her rouged lips.

"I think I like you best as a dragoman," she murmured, looking at his well-cut white suit of European garb.

"When did you first discover that Abdul the dragoman was really Paul Rodgers?" he asked.

"That morning in Wadi Halfa," she replied, "when you watched me in the mirror. For one fleeting moment I realized that you were not an Arab. A pity that I did not continue to watch the head of the Mahdi instead of watching the disguised dragoman! It was clever of you to substitute the head of Gordon Pasha."

"You were playing a dangerous game, too dangerous for a woman," he replied.

She nodded.

"Yes; it was because I was a woman I lost."

"You were brave, Anna Sokolovitch."

"But not brave enough. Do you realize what was, for me, the hardest moment of all?"

"I should like to know."

"The moment when I denounced you to that mob in the square at Omdurman.

I had known that you were Paul Rodgers, the famous Red Wolf of Arabia, for over five days. I could have had you killed easily within that time."

"Why didn't you?"

She hesitated. The engines of the air liner suddenly burst from the *tick-tock* of preparation into the roar that told of immediate departure. A gust of wind and sand swept toward them.

"Because I was in love with you."

The whisper came above the drone of the engines. She extended an ungloved white hand.

"Good-by, Paul. At least I have to thank you for nothing worse than banishment from Egypt and the Sudan. But I have hard taskmasters to face in Russia. They will not easily forgive my failure."

Impulsively Red Rodgers bent over that slim hand and kissed it. Something like a sob escaped the woman. She drew back her hand and ran toward the waiting plane. A few moments later the air-liner was nosing into the sky, heading for the north.

The Intelligence officer returned to the Grand Hotel. A telegram awaited him. He tore it open and read:

SPLENDID WORK.

BARRINGTON.

At the same time a splendidly uniformed messenger from the Palace handed him a large official envelope. It announced that the Governor General, Sir Michael Fyfe, would be pleased if Mr. Paul Rodgers could dine at the Palace that evening.

Rodgers turned to the hotel porter.

"Isn't there a train leaving for Port Sudan today?" he asked.

"Yes sir. In an hour's time."

"Book me a seat and have my baggage packed," he ordered.

HE had a sudden nostalgia for a glimpse of that glittering Red Sea on which he had sailed and adventured a hundred times. It was a nostalgia which had seized him even in the confines of Paris and Berlin. Now he could give way to it.

He seated himself at a writing-table to scribble a polite refusal to the invitation to dinner at the Palace. And even as he wrote, a hotel boy came into the lounge carrying some of his baggage.

"There is an empty hat-box here, sir. Will you take it with you?"

Last pathetic relic of Anna Sokolovitch!

"Yes; put it aboard the train," he said.

# After Worlds Collide

*The Story Thus Far:*

**A**STRONOMERS had discovered that two new planets were sweeping toward the earth on an orbit that would bring about a collision with one of them. Its companion planet was smaller; its path, while carrying it close to the world, would bear it by. So, before the cataclysm, there might be—*might be*—a chance of escape.

How some human beings prepared their escape from the earth, and how they accomplished it, by means of an ark of the air—a giant space-ship driven rocket-like by the new atomic engines—already has been told. This is the chronicle of their adventures on this new world of Bronson Beta.

They had landed near the coast of a great sea. And directed by their leader the old scientist Cole Hendron, they established a temporary camp and explored the immediate vicinity. They found a river of sweet water near by, and a valley green with mosses and ferns whose spores had withstood the age-long cold which Bronson Beta had endured since it had been torn away from its original sun—until now, when our sun was warming it again. More, they found a long smooth-paved road extending into the far distance, and a tablet of some unknown substance inscribed with what might have been writing. And they came upon a wreck of a machine, a vehicle, apparently, built of some unknown crimson metal. Had it been driven, æons ago, by human beings, or by creatures of another sort?



By EDWIN BALMER

Illustrated by

And then one night—they heard the drone of an airplane overhead, caught the flash of a wing-surface. But the visitor vanished without signal or landing.

Definite perils, moreover, beset this loneliest company of adventurers in all history. Terrific showers of meteors—presumably fragments of the old earth—bombaraded them from time to time. And three of the men—three of those who had examined the wrecked machine—died of a strange illness.

It seemed essential to learn more of this new world they had exchanged for the old; and to this end they built a small airship out of the wrecked space-ship. Hendron's right-hand man Tony Drake, with the writer Eliot James, was chosen to make an exploration flight.

It was a thing astonishing indeed which these two pioneers of a new planet found some hundreds of miles away: a great city of the Unknown People who æons ago had inhabited Bronson Beta, perfectly preserved under a gigantic dome of some transparent metal. And in exploring this long-dead city, they came upon the portrait of a woman, differing but slightly from the women of earth! God then indeed had made man in His Own image!

After three days, Drake and James set out again—and found David Ransdell with those of another American space-ship who had survived a disastrous landing. Most of their equipment had been lost, as well as many lives; and Tony's arrival was for them a promise of rescue. They too, moreover, had been visited by a strange airplane which neither landed nor signaled.

Leaving James and taking Ransdell, Tony flew back to Hendron's camp, then returned alone with a radio and other urgently needed supplies to the survivors of the second ship. Having delivered these, he took two men—Peter Vanderbilt and Jack Taylor—with him, and set out once more for the first encampment.

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*This first novel ever written from a cosmic viewpoint comes here to its great climax—as the daring survivors of Earth's doomsday, who have escaped to another and previously inhabited planet, fight out their amazing destiny.*

## and PHILIP WYLIE

Robert Fink

"Not a person in sight!" Taylor yelled suddenly as they slid toward a landing. Every person in the encampment, they found, was unconscious—stricken senseless, they presently discovered, by bombs of some anesthetic gas dropped by a fleet of strange airplanes. Presumably the enemy intention was to capture them alive—presumably, also, the strange airplanes would return. Tony, with Vanderbilt and Taylor, made ready to meet their attack by the terrific atomic blast from the space-ship's propulsion-tubes, which had already been set up like cannon at the corners of the encampment.

The attack came, and they met those weird down-swooping planes with the same dreadful blast that had destroyed their enemies back on earth—met them and annihilated them. Their unconscious comrades recovered unharmed; but they realized that other attacks would come, and decided to take refuge in the nearest of the domed cities of the Other People. They set out along an ancient but perfect road; and on the way they met—one of the strange vehicles of the Other People, driven by an English girl! A British space-ship, she told them, had also made the voyage from Earth, but had suffered severely; and its survivors had been made captive by the militant crews of a Russo-German-Oriental coalition who were determined to rule this new world. They had mastered the secret of the Betan vehicles—and Lady Cynthia had escaped in one. . . .

Hendron had been failing rapidly, and had turned over the command to Tony. Now, like Moses of old, he died within sight of the Promised Land—the domed city of the Other People. His grieving friends carried him within, and set out to explore their new domicile. . . . One of them, Von Beitz, failed to return.

Exploration of the domed city taught them much of the Other People. It taught them, also, that the source of light and heat was not within this city at

all, but in or near the city controlled by the Midianites—as they called the enemy coalition. So they were really at the mercy of the enemy, for the dreadful Bronson Beta winter was coming on; and life itself depended on the continued supply of light and power. . . .

The watchers at the gate saw a "lark" plane approaching. It lurched down to an awkward landing—piloted, they discovered, by Von Beitz, who was badly wounded. (*The story continues in detail:*)

THE watchers at the gate of the city ceased to be mere spectators, and poured out. Many were useless; they merely endangered themselves to no purpose. Eliot James, who had the local command, shouted for all but one other, besides himself, to keep under the shield of the city; and he and that other ran forward as Tony and Jack Taylor emerged from the half-wrecked plane and pulled out the limp form of Von Beitz.

The two uninjured men, bearing Von Beitz, began to run across the open space between the city and the ship; and Eliot with his companion, Waterman, ran toward them.

From the north the swarm of pursuing planes approached—the planes of the Other People, of the Vanished People of this planet, which had been appropriated by the "Midianites."

At least, that was what Eliot believed as he glanced up and saw the great metal larks in the sky. It must be men from



earth who piloted them; yet deep in his thoughts clung the fantastic idea that it might be Bronson Betan hands which piloted these splendid planes, even as Bronson Betan hands and brains had built them a million years ago before the Other People began their frightful drift into the cold and darkness of space between the stars.

Bullets, or some sort of projectiles, splashed up dirt before him and left Eliot no illusions as to the attitude of these pilots, whoever they might be. But he was unhurt; his comrade also was unhurt, and neither Tony nor Jack Taylor stumbled.

The attack from the air ceased; the planes veered away and dispersed so suddenly that it seemed to Eliot that they must have been signaled.

Waterman and he reached Tony and Taylor, and the four bore Von Beitz within the gate, which swiftly was shut behind them.

Women, as well as men, surrounded them. Tony turned at Eve's touch, and he stared at her dazedly.

"Tony," she implored him, "are you hurt too? Did they hit you?"

He shook his head; he was panting so violently that any expression of his feelings, as she held to him, was impossible. For a brief moment he caught her hand and held it, but gasped only: "Get Dodson—for—Von Beitz."

The command was unnecessary. Dodson was already kneeling over the German.

Eliot pressed back the people who crowded too close. The surgeon opened his kit, which had never been far from his hand during the perilous months on this planet. He began to administer drugs. "Half starved," he muttered. "No bones broken. Exhaustion. In terrible fight. Fists. Knife—at least some one had one in the fight. Wait!"

THE German opened his eyes and sat up. "*Danke schön*," he said.

"Not yet!" Dodson warned, pushing his patient back into a reclining position.

"Take your time," Tony begged him, though he himself jerked with impatience for Von Beitz' report. He gazed up through the shield over the city into the sky, for the airplanes which had pursued, and which so suddenly had abandoned attack.

"Where are they?" he said to Eliot James.

"Gone."

"What scared them off?"

"What happened to their other planes before, I guess," said Eliot.

"Would they all have remembered it together just at the same second?" Tony asked.

Eliot shook his head; the planes were gone, whatever had turned them back; thought of them could engage neither Eliot nor Tony—nor Eve, since they had spared Tony.

She clung close to him in tender concern. They were in the inner edge of the circle, watching the German, who lay now with eyes shut and a scowl on his face.

The spasm of pain appeared to pass; he opened his eyes, and looking up at Tony, he winked.

IT was the most reassuring thing he could have done. "Good stuff!" Tony whispered to Eve.

"Where was he, Tony?"

The German seemed to have heard; he spoke to the Doctor. "I should not sit up, eh?"

Dodson reminded: "You've had a terrible beating, Von Beitz. You're half starved. When you've had some hot soup, and when I've dressed your various cuts and bruises, you'll be able to talk."

"Pooh!" said the man on the ground. "You've been searching for me, eh? And now you want to know why I come dramatically in a ship from the north? Well—I will tell you. I can eat later. But I will lie down. You must know at once."

"I rounded a corner in this city as you know; and to you, I vanished. To myself—four men seized me. A cord about the neck, a sack over the head. It gave me no fear that my assailants might have been men from Bronson Beta," Von Beitz added sardonically. "The technique was too much of our world as we have known it. I was down and helpless, knowing no more of my attackers than that they must be men from earth."

"We spent I do not know how long hiding high in a building in this city. My eyes were taped shut. I was gagged much of the time, but I was given food, and—except on occasions which I will come to—I was not badly treated."

"At first they spoke between themselves in tongues I could not understand, but it was not language of another planet. It was speech from our old



world—Russian sometimes, I am sure; sometimes, I think, Japanese.”

“Did you discover how many there were?” Eliot James asked.

“Here in this city watching us,” Von Beitz proceeded after a moment, “there were four at least. I am sure I heard four different voices speak. Sometimes it seemed to me that more moved back and forth; but I cannot be certain that more than four actually were here.”

“Men?” asked Tony.



As Tony and Jack Taylor emerged from the half-wrecked plane, with the limp form of Von Beitz, Eliot James and Waterman ran toward them from the gate.

“They were all men. I heard no woman speak; it was never a woman’s hand that touched me. But they talked a great deal about women as they watched us,” Von Beitz said.

“You mean, you heard them talking about our women? They talked in some language you understood?”

"No; not then. They talked about our women in their own tongues. But I did not need to understand the words to know they were talking about—women."

"I see," said Tony.

"They did talk to me in English later—two of them did."

He stopped again.

"What did they tell you?"

"Tell me?" repeated Von Beitz.

"Nothing. They asked me."

"Asked you what?"

"About you—about us. They wanted to know what we knew, how far we had progressed in mastering the secrets of the Old People."

"Ah!" said Tony.

"They were here—those four—before we moved into this city. They were sent here as similar squads of them were sent to every other city accessible to them. You see, they moved into their city—which apparently was the old capital of this planet or at least of this continent—long before we made any move at all."

"Yes," said Tony. "That's clear."

"Our delay," breathed Von Beitz, "laid on us a great handicap." He did not continue that criticism, but observed: "For they grasped the essentials of the situation almost at once. It lay, of course, in mastery of the mechanics of the ancient civilization. So they seized at once and occupied the key city; and they dispatched a squad to each of the other cities, to explore and bring back to them whatever might be useful."

**A**GAIN he had to rest, and the others waited.

"Particularly diagrams."

"Diagrams?"

"The working plans of the cities, and the machinery and of the passages which, without the diagrams, you could not suspect."

"Underground passages?"

"Precisely. That is how they took me out of the city. They laughed at us guarding all the gates! When they decided to take me away, two of them escorted me underground and led me on foot to a door that was opened only after some special ceremony, and which communicated with a conduit."

"Conduit for what?"

"I could only suppose what. My eyes were taped, and during this journey, even my ears were muffled; but I am sure from my sensations during the journey that I was underground, and carried

through a long, close conduit like a great pipe."

"Carried?" repeated Tony, as the others in the group excitedly crowded closer to catch the weak word. "How did they carry you?"

**I**N a car. They sat me up in some sort of small car which ran very rapidly—and, I am sure, underground. I could feel enough of it with my hands to be sure it was not what we would call a passenger-car. I am sure now, from what I felt at the time, and what I learned later, that it was a work-car, built by the Old People for their workmen in the conduit. I was taken into a power tunnel, I believe, and transported in a work-car through the conduit to the other city. Certainly when, after a time I can only estimate as hours, I was brought up to daylight, it was in the city occupied by Russians and Japanese, and with them, on the same terms, some Germans. There are also English there, men and women; but not on the same terms as the others."

"Go on!" begged several voices.

"They let me see the city—and themselves," said Von Beitz. "It is a great city—greater than this, and very beautiful. It offers them everything that they could have dreamed of—and more! It makes them, as they succeed in mastering its secrets, like gods! Or they think so!"

"Like gods!"

"Yes," said Von Beitz, "that is our great danger. They feel like gods; they must be like gods; and how can they be gods, without mortals to make them obeisance and do them reverence? So they will be the gods; and we will be the mortals to do their bidding. Already they have taken the English and set themselves above them, as you have heard. They tried to take us—as you know. We killed some of them—some of the most ruthless and dangerous; but others remain. They know they need not endanger themselves. They wait for us confidently."

"Wait for us? How?"

"To come to them."

"But if we don't come?"

"We must."

"Why?"

"We have no help for ourselves—and they know it. For the truth is as we feared. For all these great cities of the eastern section of this continent," the German declared solemnly and slowly,

"there is a single power city—or station. It is located deep underground—not directly beneath their city, but near it. Of course they control it, and control, therefore, light and power—and heat. Any of these we can enjoy only as they ration it to us.

"We move out, as we know, toward the cold orbit of Mars where heat will mean life in our long dark nights. They wait for that moment for us to admit their godship, and come and bow down before them."

Tony stared silently at Von Beitz, biting his lip and clenching his hands. He remembered the exaltation which he had felt—which he could not help feeling—when he realized that he was in command in this single city. *They* felt themselves in command—in absolute power—over this planet. He could comprehend their believing themselves almost gods.

The weakened man went on: "In the cavern city where are the engines which draw power from the hot center of this planet, a guard of the 'gods' stands watch. It is the citadel of their authority, the palladium of their power. I have not seen the station; but yesterday I learned its location. I stole a diagram and traced it before I was discovered. I escaped my guards. I fought my way into a ship this morning."

"You have the tracing?" Dodson whispered.

The German smiled. "I have it."

He shut his eyes and gave a sigh that was partly a groan. Dodson leaned over him. "We'll carry you to the center of the city now. You've taken a terrible beating."

Von Beitz opened one eye, then, and a grin overspread his battered features. "My dear Dodson," he replied spiritedly, although in a low tone, "if you think I've taken a terrible beating, you ought to see the other fellows. Three of them! One I left without so many teeth as he had had. The one who had the knife, I robbed of his weapon, and I put it between his ribs—where, I fear, it will take mortal effect. The third—alas, his own mother would neither recognize nor receive him!"

With those words the courageous Von Beitz quietly fainted.

TONY told Jack Taylor to post a call for a meeting, in the evening, of the Council of the Central Authority; and he himself accompanied those who bore Von Beitz to Dodson's hospital.

It was, of course, really a hospital of the Other People which Dodson had pre-empted. The plan of the place and its equipment delighted Dodson and at the same time drove him to despair trying to imagine the right uses of some of the implements of the surgery, and the procedures of those Vanished People.

Von Beitz' case was, however, a simple one; and Tony left, fully assured that the German would completely recover.

Tony went home—to the splendid, graceful apartment where he knew he would find Eve, and which they called their home because they occupied it. But they could never be free from consciousness that it was not theirs—that minds and emotions immensely distant from them had designed this place of repose.

Minds far in the future, Tony always felt, though he knew that the Other People actually pertained to the epochal past; but though they had lived a million years ago, yet they had passed beyond the people of earth before they came to gaze on the dawn of their day of extinction. So, strangely, Tony knew he was living in an apartment of the past, but felt it to be like one of the future. Time had become completely confusing.

WHAT were years? What had they been? A year had been the measure of an interval in which the earth circled the sun. But the earth, except in fragments, no longer went around the sun. This planet had taken its place; and earthly time ceased to have significance. You lived in the time of this strange planet; its eons and epochs were behind you; and the incalculable accomplishments of its people.

The soft illumination of interiors, to which he had now become accustomed, glowed in the hallway. It was agreeable, soothing, never harsh; and the soft pastel colors of the walls showed patterns pleasing to the eyes, though they were eyes from earth, and earth never had seen anything similar.

Taste, thought Tony, reached through the universe; and beauty; and happiness—and peace. And cruelty also? When had these Other People been cruel? Had they cast it off only at last?

He was very tired, but excited too; he was glad to find Eve alone, awaiting him.

He kissed her, and held her, and for a moment let himself forget all else but the softness of her in his arms, and the warmth of her lips on his.

"Lord of my love," she whispered, in her own ecstasy. "Lord of my love," she repeated; and holding him, went on:

*To whom in vassalage,  
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit.*

"Oh," said Tony.

"I memorized it as a child, Tony, never guessing at its meaning till now. How could Shakespeare have found words, dear, for so many feelings? . . . This place was planned for love, Tony."

"Yes."

"They loved here, Tony; some couple very young—a million years ago. We lie on their couch. . . . Where are they?"

"Where we, sometime, shall probably be; but why think of that? '*From fairest creatures*'—finish that for me, Eve, can you?"

"The first sonnet, you mean?"

"I don't know the number; but I knew it once—at Groton. I had to learn it to get into Harvard for the college board examinations. Wait: I've got more of it:

*"From fairest creatures we desire increase,  
That thereby beauty's rose shall never die"*

"Where are Harvard, and Groton, now, Tony?"

"With Nineveh and Tyre; but you're here—and beauty's rose shall never die. . . . And by God, no one will take you from me—or freeze you in the cold, if I don't let you go."

"You've the diagram that Von Beitz brought?"

"I've seen it—studied it. He did well; but not enough. We know now where is the great central power-station; but we don't know how to get to it. We don't know even how they get in and out of this city."

"You think they still do?"

"We can't say that they don't. Undoubtedly Von Beitz was right; he was taken out by way of some conduit. We'll have to find that first, and stop it up or guard it; and then there may be a dozen underground doors leading anywhere, for purposes we've not progressed enough to guess. We've got to catch up on the old records of this place—though it's plain that some of them have been removed by the men who captured Von Beitz. Yet we've an awful lot to learn that we can learn."

"Tony, it's perfectly fascinating—and terrible, some of it. I met Professor Philbin when I was coming here. I never saw him so excited. He didn't know any-

thing about what had just happened; he didn't even know that Von Beitz had returned. When I told him, he only stared at me; he wondered why I'd mentioned it. He was living in something far more exciting. He'd found the record, Tony, of the Other People when they first discovered the star of their doom approaching! He was looking for you; he wants to report to you what happened here, Tony, a million years ago!"

But Tony not yet could leave her. "If it's waited a million years, it can wait," he said, "ten minutes more."

## CHAPTER XVII

### AT THE MERCY OF THE MIDIANITES

TONY found Philbin with Duquesne, to whom the linguist had brought his version of the records he had decoded.

The French astronomer strode about the table in his excitement.

"We may picture now, with some confidence," he proclaimed to Tony, "the original situation of this planet—the place which it occupied in the universe when the people, who have provided these cities for us, lived.

"Its star—its sun—was, as we know, in the south. Eleven planets, of which this was one, circled that sun. This planet, and the one which we called Bronson Alpha, were the fifth and sixth in order of distance away from their sun. They were more closely associated than any other two planets; in fact, this planet revolved about Bronson Alpha almost like a moon. But it was not like our moon, which was always a dead world. It was Bronson Alpha, the greater planet, which bore no life; it was this planet—the smaller of the two—which bore life. And what a splendid order of life it bore at the end of its time!

"It seems to have been about two hundred years before the end that the people on this planet began to appreciate that a star was approaching which was to tear them away from their sun and cast them out into utter darkness and cold. There appear to have been living on this world, at that time, about one billion people."

"One billion people!" Tony exclaimed.

Philbin nodded. "One thousand million—about two-thirds of the population of our earth before our destruction began. I have found reference to earlier conditions of this planet which indicates that at one time the total population here

might have been similar to ours. They had solved sanitation problems, and health and nutrition difficulties, at least a thousand years earlier; and for centuries their population grew rapidly; yet I believe that they never had quite the total population of our earth.

"After they became scientific and gained control of their living conditions,—and the conditions of birth,—they seem to have reduced their total number to about a billion. They seem to have stabilized at that figure.

"For centuries there seems to have been little change, except locally; they kept their birth-rate approximately level with their death rate. The thousand million of people were spread fairly evenly, in cities, towns and villages, over the best parts of this planet. Civilization seems to have spread and been established everywhere, though the people were not everywhere homogeneous. It is perfectly plain that they had developed at least six different races of men, with some forty or fifty subdivisions distinguished by what we called 'national' characteristics. I have not yet been able to make out the form of their government at the time prior to the approach of the destroying star; but it is clear that war either was very rare or had been completely abandoned.

"They had come to provide for themselves a very high quality of life; they seemed to have established throughout their globe both peace and comfort—when their scientists saw their fatal star approaching."

"Go on," said Tony, when Philbin halted. "Or can't you?"

"Yes. I know a little more of what they did at that time—or at least how they felt—that billion people who used to live on this earth."

**Y**ET he halted again while he gazed about the hall at their handicraft, their lovely sensitive art and decorations. They were gone—the billion of them—but they had been people who strived and struggled, and who had undergone an ordeal surpassing, in its prolonged torture, the agonies of the end of the earth. Philbin, the linguist and translator, tried to put some of this into words.

"You will pardon me, my friends," he said to Tony and Duquesne, "and understand that I can give you facts in fragmentary manner only, at this moment. My source is an autobiography of a man called Lagon—Lagon Itol. Lagon was



"By God, no one will take you from me!"

what we would consider his surname. He was an artist and an architect of the time I speak of—the period of their discovery of, or their realization of, their threatened extinction from the approach of the star.

"With this autobiography of Lagon Itol, I found a volume about him by one of his contemporaries—one Jerad Kan. Lagon was a genius; he was, I think, the Michelangelo of this planet; and

with this enormous artistic and architectural ability, he had an insatiable curiosity and interest in personalities. He kept a most careful diary, which is like nothing so much as Samuel Pepys'. Think of this remarkable man—Lagon Itol—as an amazingly vital, vigorous blending of our Michelangelo and Samuel Pepys.

"He records on this page," Philbin spread it before Tony and Duquesne,—"his first fear, if you will call it that, of the star.

"This is how I translate his words:

"Colk called today. He says the star Borak will certainly disturb us—or rather the great-grandchildren of our great-grandchildren. It presents us a pretty problem for survival."

"Now the inspiring, and the exciting thing," exclaimed Philbin, "is to follow how this Lagon Itol immediately set to work to plan a scheme of survival for these people—though the need for that scheme would not come until the time of his great-grandchildren's grandchildren."

**D**UQUESNE, with Tony, was staring at the page, the words of which they could not read; but there was a sketch there which fascinated them.

"It looks," cried Duquesne, "like a first imagination of this city!"

"That's what it was," said Philbin. "It is perfectly clear that cities of this type were Wend, Strahl, Gorfulu, Danot and Khorlu.

"None of these names appear anywhere in the records of the time of which I am speaking; no such cities existed. Here Lagon Itol first began to dream of them, and he and his friend Jerad Kan began to write, educating the people to plan for what lay ahead of their grandchildren's grandchildren.

"For what happened to them—what, at that time, was threatened and had not yet occurred—was a widely different doom from that of our earth. When we discovered our destroyers, we knew that we ourselves must face the destruction, and that very soon."

"Precisely!" Duquesne had to exclaim. "Time for us was more merciful! For them—for two hundred years, at least, they must have looked at their doom! Tell me, friend, how a mind like that of this Lagon Itol met it."

"In the most inevasive way. It is plain from his diary that, in his time, there was doubt—or at least the best scientists were divided—over the point

as to whether the approaching star would tear this planet completely away from its sun, or would merely alter its orbit so as to make the climate, for part of the year, very much colder. Lagon Itol considered both of those possibilities. He made a plan for survival under colder conditions; he also speculated on the possibilities of survival even in the dark and cold of space.

"Lagon Itol himself did not believe that was the probability. The approach of the star was not to be a near passing, except in astronomical terms; it would not come within a billion miles of the sun of Bronson Beta. It was certain to affect the orbit of this planet; but would it make that orbit wholly unstable?

"Lagon Itol seems to have proceeded on the assumption it would not. On this day, on this page, he discusses that. On this next page, he is discussing the effects of the uses of *klul*."

"*Klul*?" asked Tony.

"Apparently it was a drug they used to make the air more exhilarating—or intoxicating. It seems to have been one of the dearest vices, or indulgences, of the Other People. They let *klul* evaporate in a room; then they came in and breathed it. It appears to have been extraordinarily pleasant; both sexes indulged in it, but it was forbidden to children. Lagon Itol records the formula, as he did all things that interested him."

"But," said Tony, "you found no actual diagram of the engineering arrangements under the cities?"

"At the time in which I now find myself," said Philbin, "these cities existed only in Lagon Itol's fancy. His diary either was missed by our friends the Midianites, when they tried to remove all diagrams that would have been useful to us; or else they considered this book harmless."

**S**TEADILY the sun diminished in size; blue shadows stole across the plains of the adopted planet as the long, late afternoons dwindled to dark, and in the night, the outer temperature dropped far below zero.

Under the shield of the city, heat remained, and was renewed from the huge transformers fed from impulses far away.

By mercy of the Midianites!

By mercy, or by policy?

They argued this under the great glass shield of the city of Hendron—known to its builders long ago as Khorlu



—while their world slipped farther and farther from the sun.

Hourly they argued this, especially at night, when the needed lights burned bright, and the ventilators spun, circulating the warmed currents of air to combat the bitter cold that settled on the shield. And machinery moved, because the power impulses sent from the station in control of the Midianites continued.

THE enemy made no attack. Indeed, only at a distance did they reappear at all; and then it was in the sky. Larks hovered but far away—watching; that was all. And Tony told his pilots, who also were flying larks, not to molest them, or even appear to attack them.

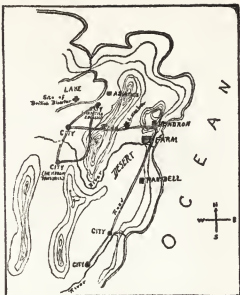
What if they sent down a few flyers from the sky? Attack upon the city with a few planes would be absurd; attack from the ground would be fantastic. The defense, established in any of these great metal cities, must be impregnable; the advantage of cover was overwhelming. The Midianites themselves appreciated this. After the pursuit of Von Beitz, they made no move which even suggested an attack upon Hendron. To the contrary, they continued to send through the conduits under the ground the power-impulses which kept lighted and warm the city of Hendron, much as it had been when it was Khorlu, a million years ago.

*Khorlu*, *Wend*, *Strahl*, *Gorfulu*, and *Danot*—so the Other People had named the five cities they had built in defiance of the destruction stealing upon them—the five cities forecast in the sketches of Lagon Itol.

*Wend* was the great shielded metropolis which Tony and Eliot James first had visited; *Strahl* and *Danot* were the two similar cities seen, and mapped, to the south.

*Gorfulu* was the greatest; and not only that—it was the control-city of the group; for it dominated the underground works which generated the power for the entire group of cities. It was *Gorfulu* that the Midianites had seized for themselves, and to which they had brought the survivors of the English space-ship, as captives.

It had been easy enough to promise to the English girl who had escaped—Lady Cynthia, met on the road to Hendron-Khorlu—that Hendron's people would rescue the English from the Midianites. But that promise appeared only more and more wild and fantastic as the new inhabitants of Hendron-Khorlu became



more familiar with the peculiar strength of the shielded cities.

Attack upon the city, with the weapons at hand and transportable, would be folly; every feature and material of construction of the cities gave overwhelming advantage to the defense.

No one offered any scheme of attack that suggested any chance of success.

Jack Taylor and Ransdell, and Tony and Eliot James and Peter Vanderbilt (for though he was not of the younger men, he remained of the boldest) met often and planned attack; but while they talked, they knew they were helpless.

"The fact is," said Eliot James once, putting frankly in open words what they all were feeling, "so far from being able to conquer *them*, we're at their mercy this minute; and they know it."

Peter Vanderbilt nodded. "And as regards *them*, I have little illusion that the quality of mercy is much strained. Let us adjourn for a walk in the square, or—what have you?"

"Tony, did you know that the portrait bust near the north gate is of Lagon Itol? Philbin assured me of it, quite positively, yesterday. He looked a good deal like Goethe, don't you think?"

"I'll take another look at it," said Tony; but he did not go out with the others. He sought Eve in the delightful apartment fitted for other lovers a million years ago, and lighted by the small distant sun whose heat was reinforced by warmth from power-impulses from machines engineered and prepared by the minds and hands of a million years

ago, machines which had been repaired and were operated by the Midianites.

For the power-impulses continued to come; and this fact persuaded many, in the city of Hendron-Khorlu, that a change of heart must have affected the party of men from earth who held control of the capitol of the Vanished People.

They had come to their senses, some were sure as they worked, under the shield of the city of Hendron-Khorlu, at the emergency measures which the council of the Central Authority had ordered.

But if some believed in the mercy of the men who had taken over the capital that controlled the conditions in all the cities, others did not become so credulous.

"When are they going to shut us off?" they asked each other; and when they did not utter the words, they wanted to. The waiting had become an obsession.

They felt themselves teased and tantalized by this unceasing, silent provision of light and heat and power which kept them comfortable—indeed in luxury—under the dome of the great transparent shield when the world without was frozen.

THE long rivers had turned to ice; the lake became a sheet of ice which the sun at noonday scarcely affected. Floes filled the seas, the pilots of the larks reported. Frequently at noonday, when the small sun stood nearly overhead, surfaces thawed, but when the world began to turn away, and long before the darkness, it was bitterly cold again; and the night was arctic.

It was at night that It came—at dinner-time.

The company under Tony's command were assembled in the great hall where meals were served. A few of the men stood at salient posts, always on watch. There was a watch at the top of the tallest towers, and at the eight gates. Guards were posted also at the passages to the chief channels below the city. . . .

The lights went out. Later it was realized that, simultaneously, the movement of the currents of warmed air ceased; but at first this was appreciated only by those stationed near the fans, which whirled to a stop in a humming diminuendo.

Not only the great halls were blackened, but the streets became tombs.

It was an overcast night; and no single star showed even to the watchers on the towers. Light died and was buried; and all in silence.

In the unbreathing, Stygian oppressiveness of the dining-hall, Tony arose—an invisible figure. He felt blotted out. He wondered whether his voice, when he spoke, could be heard.

"They've done it, my friends. This is no accident, no failure which they will repair. They have shut off our power-source. So immediately we put into effect our plans for this emergency; we go under the power-loss orders which you all already know."

Matches were struck and applied to torches previously fixed on brackets about the hall. Everybody pretended to like it; everybody sat down again. Dinner went on in a medieval gloom.

Ransdell, charged with the security of the streets, went out and inspected the guard positions where he was challenged by his sentries, who examined him in the glare of flashlights attached to condenser batteries; but the stored electricity was to be used but sparingly. The company had charged the batteries by the thousand; but what were they against the darkness and cold to come?

Combustible substances must be used for light wherever possible, and always for heat.

"It's begun," said Dodson to James.

"I won't worry about putting it down in my book tonight," the diarist replied. "I'll not forget it before tomorrow!"

He was aware of an anger within him which had no parallel in his experience.

"They're doing this," he said, scarcely more to the surgeon than to himself. "They're doing this deliberately to freeze us out to them—to take their terms."

"What terms exactly, d'you suppose?" some one inquired calmly.

Eliot turned, and in the flickering glow of a flare, he faced Peter Vanderbilt.

"We'll hear soon enough, I'd say."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FATE OF THE OTHER PEOPLE

BUT no terms came; no communication at all arrived from those in control of the capital city—and in control, therefore, of the five shielded cities.

Gorfulu maintained its illumination, as Eliot James and Ransdell ascertained by flying at dawn and sighting the great glowing dome of the ancient capital. Light pervaded that city as before; and beyond question, heat was there.

Ransdell circled the city and turned back, as larks, piloted by the Midianites,

rose into the sky. Ransdell had promised Tony neither to seem to offer attack, nor to provoke it. He flew directly home.

Other pilots inspected the three other cities—Wend, Strahl and Danot, the shields of which, like the dome of the capital, remained aglow; and these pilots flew back also to Hendron-Khorlu, which



Ransdell, on inspection tours, was challenged by the sentries with flashlights.

alone of the five cities lay lightless and cold in the winter morning.

In the great Hall of the Council, these pilots reported to James and Ransdell:

"They've cut us off—and us alone."

"Why not, then," some one said, "move to another city? To Wend?"

"Then wouldn't they cut us off there?" countered Ransdell practically. "The only reason those cities aren't cut off is because we aren't there."

"But they're not occupied, are they?"

"Not in force," replied Ransdell. "But they've an observation group in each of the other cities—as they had here."

"Then how about some other cities—elsewhere?"

"Where else?" questioned Ransdell; for he had done much observation flying.

"On some other continent—perhaps in the other hemisphere."

"There are no other cities suitable."



"Nowhere else in this world?"

"None. The old globes which we found do not show them; and we have never found any others."

"But why were there only these five?"

"Well," said Ransdell, "why were there even as many as five cities at the end?"

"But we have been told that the old population of the planet was one billion people!"

"Not at the end, however!"

"What happened?"

Dave Ransdell, for reply, turned about to Tony.

"We can give today at least a partial answer to that," Tony said, looking about the little group of his Council. "And I think it can be considered pertinent to our discussion of our own emergency, for we are dealing with a mechanism of living—or of dying—created not by ourselves but by the original people of this planet. It certainly can only be of help to us to understand what they did. Professor Philbin," he said, "please tell us."

The little linguist arose.

"You have all heard, I may assume, something of the state of this planet at the time when the studies of the star approaching convinced the scientists of this planet that it was certain to disturb life here greatly."

**P**PETER VANDERBILT arose quietly; and when Philbin stopped, Vanderbilt suggested:

"Should not everyone hear this?"

"Certainly," said Tony. "Open the doors." And into the great room hundreds came in and stood. For the halls without had been crowded. Nearly everybody was there, except men on watch or detailed to definite errands. Men, women and girls crowded as close as they could to the council-table; even the children came—the two children saved from the doom of earth on the first space-ship.

"I can assume," the little linguist repeated, "that you all have learned what we, who have been interpreting the books, learned and reported some days ago of the time of Lagon Itol, which was approximately two hundred years before this planet was torn from its sun."

"Lagon Itol—who was certainly a very great man, one of enormous perceptions and imagination—considers in his diary the fate facing one billion people; so we may put that as a rough figure for the population of this planet in his time."

But he astutely observes that there would be nothing like that number finally to face their fate; and he was right. From his time, the people of this planet rapidly reduced themselves in number by diminishing births. In fact, before he died, he observed it and recorded it; he even speculated on the probable number who would be alive to face the catastrophe.

"I have now discovered an official record of their year 16,584, *Ecliptic*."

"*Ecliptic*?" a woman, close to the table, questioned.

"*Ecliptic*—reckoned, I mean, from the first eclipse. The old people here," Philbin explained, "had a very accurate and rational way of reckoning. For thousands of years, their determinations of time were exceedingly precise; but as on earth, of course their history went back through ages of rough record and without record into oral traditions. Undoubtedly they once had scores or hundreds of arbitrary points from which they reckoned the years locally—as our Egyptians reckoned years from the start of the reigns of each Pharaoh. As we all recollect, most of our civilized world finally agreed upon a year which we called the Year of Our Lord, from which we reckoned backward and forward."

"The people of Bronson Beta chose a year of a famous eclipse. For this planet, and its huge companion Bronson Alpha, circled their sun in such a way that eclipses sometimes—though rarely—occurred. They were not so frequent as with the earth; they happened, on the average, about once in fifty years. Each was, therefore, more notable; and early in the history of man on this planet, there was a special eclipse which was noted by many nations of the primitive people. Later civilized ages could identify that eclipse with certainty and assign it a definite date. It offered itself as a very convenient and logical point from which to reckon the start of rational processes—the first recorded eclipse."

"Lagon Itol first mentions the disturbing star in the year 16,481, *Ecliptic*. He died in the year 16,504—before which time, as I have told you, he saw the population of the planet rapidly being reduced."

"For the year 16,584 I have, I say, the official census figures; they total slightly over two hundred millions of people—a reduction of four-fifths in approximately a century, or a loss of eight hundred millions of people."

Many gasped aloud. "What happened?" voices asked. "A world plague? The Black Death?"

"No plague, no unusual death," the little linguist continued. "Merely a cessation of births—or what must have been, for a time, almost a cessation. Would we have done differently? Who of us brought babies into the world, in our last two years, only to be destroyed? How many of us would have wanted children against a destruction if it was still a hundred years away?"

"What happened to this planet was one of the things that might have happened to our earth—"

DUQUESNE broke in: "In fact, my friends, what happened here was the commoner occurrence in the cosmos. The fate of our earth was one of the ends of existence which always was possible, but yet exceedingly rare. The fate of this planet was much more typical of the ends of the earths which have been happening, and must continue to happen, until the termination of time. What is the first state of a star? Loneliness. At last another star approaches; and from its own substance, streamers are torn forth. The disturbing star passes on; but it has begot—planets. For it is from the substance that streamed from the sun, when another sun came close, that worlds are born.

"They circle their solitary parent, the sun; they cool and grow old; and upon one or two, not too large or too small, or too near or too far away from the sun, life begins—and grows and changes, and becomes man.

"Through millions of years!

"And what saves him, through all these ages? Nothing but the solitary situation of his sun; it is the loneliness of the Life-giver—the loneliness of his sun in space—that permits man and his world to endure.

"But at last the sun suffers it no longer; once more, it must speak to another star; and at last—for always sometime it must be so, even in the loneliness of the sky—another sun approaches; and before fresh material is sucked out to start another set of worlds, the spheres already old are drawn away and cast out into space. Such is the circle of life—and death—of worlds, to which all must, in the end, submit. Sometime one of those cast-off worlds may find another sun, as this has done."

The Frenchman bowed to Philbin.

"You were, monsieur, in the year of this planet the sixteenth thousand, five hundred and eighty-fourth, Ecliptic. I return you to it."

"It was a remarkable year," said the little linguist, thrillingly, "if for no other reason, because of the production of the tremendous pessimistic poem 'Talon.'"

"I translate the original title—*Talon*, a claw. The Talon of Time was meant. The people here understood the awful circle of the life, and death, of worlds as M. Duquesne has just sketched it. The poet of 'Talon' was the Omar Khayyam of their days of facing their fate. So in a poem of marvelous power he pictures man pursued by Time—a great tantalizing, merciless bird of prey which waits for him through the ages while he rises from a clod without soul to feel and brain to know, until he can appreciate and apperceive the awful irony of his fate; then the bird reaches out its great talon and tears him to pieces.

"I despair adequately to render in our words the ironic tragedy of this poem; but Fitzgerald, translating our Omar, has rendered two lines like two of these:

"*'Lo!—the phantom Caravan has reached  
The nothing it set out from. Oh, make haste!'*"

"Like Omar, the poet preached pleasure; and he laughed at the ghastly futility of those who defied and fought the fated drift of their world into eternal darkness and cold.

"CLEARLY he presented the prevailing mood of the period; but clearly, also, there was another mood. The spiritual and intellectual heirs of Lagon Itol had proceeded with his plans for these cities.

"There was yet no complete agreement among the scientists that this world must be torn away from its sun. Its orbit was on the edge of the critical area of disturbance. Everyone agreed that the five outer planets would surely be torn away; they agreed that the next planet inferior—that is, nearer its sun than this one—probably would not be torn away.

"The name of that planet was Ocron; and by the way, these people knew that it was inhabited.

"They agreed that this world on which we now stand would be severely altered in its orbit; yet they considered there was a chance it would not be torn away.

"Yet that chance did not appeal to many. By the year 16,675 Ecliptic—which is the last year for which I can

find a census—the total population was under twelve million, and many of them very old. The number of children under ten years is given separately; they were less than a hundred and fifty thousand. At the rate they were allowing themselves to die, probably there were barely ten millions of people of all ages when the disturbing star—which they called Borak—came its closest and cast them off into space.

"The best of the energies of the dwindling millions had been put, for two generations, into these five cities which were planned, located and created and equipped for the final defiance of extinction. They abandoned all older habitations and adopted these."

"But where did they go, in the end?"

A dozen demanded it, together.

"Of that mystery, we have not yet," Philbin confessed, "a trace. They had reduced themselves, we know, from a billion in number at the time of Lagon Itol—two hundred years before—to about ten millions. Barely one per cent of them, therefore, were spared up to the time of the catastrophe to attempt the tremendous task of further survival.

"Throughout at least the last five thousand years of their history, cremation of the dead was universal among them. We will find no cemeteries or entombments, except perhaps a very few archaic barrows from a very early age. The people throughout their civilized period disposed of their dead in a systematic, orderly and decent way.

"Now, did the last ten million also die, and as they went, were they also cremated by their survivors, so that we will find, at the end, only the bones of some small group who, enduring to the last, had disposed of those immediately before them? Or somehow, did some of them—escape?"

The great chamber of the Council was tensely silent, close-crowded as it was.

It was Tony, presiding, and having the advantage of having heard most of these facts before, who first found voice:

"Returning to our present problem," he recalled them to that which had gathered them together, "it is clear that we can find no other cities of the shielded type, and equipped to combat the cold, except the five we know; for no others ever were built. We know also that there is no other generating station providing light and heat and power, except that close to Gorfulu; for no other ever was planned or built."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE PIONEERS PLAN REPRISALS

JACK TAYLOR'S post, when on watch, was the northern gate.

"The Porte de Gorfulu," Duquesne had dubbed it, recalling the fashion in Paris of naming the gate after the city to which, and from which, its road ran.

There was not at this gate, or at any of the seven others, any actual guard station. What Philbin had read had made certain, if it had been doubtful before, that the builders of these cities had acted in complete coöperation and



unison; they had been banded together in their desperate attempt to defy their fate of dark and cold.

HOWEVER, the structural scheme and the materials chosen had made each gate exceedingly strong. It would have required artillery to reduce it; and artillery here did not exist, except perhaps in some museum of archaeology of the Vanished People.

The blast of the atomic tubes, which had transported the Arks through space, of course could reduce any of the gates; but first they must be brought to the



vicinity and placed in position; and if this could be done without danger, there was the problem of the lining of the tubes. Those in the second space-ship from Michigan, commanded by Ransdell, actually had burnt out at the end of the passage, and had contributed to the disaster which overtook that party.

Little, indeed had been left of the lining in the tubes of the ark which Hendron himself, more successfully, had piloted. So it was fairly certain that the propulsion-tubes in the possession of the Midianites must be in similar state.

"What they have left of the lining,



It was revolvers, knives, iron bars—anything was a weapon at close quarters.

they'll save for their own defense—as we used ours," Jack expressed his opinion to Eliot James, who today was standing watch with him.

Eliot nodded. "I think so. At least, I'm sure they'll not attack us with the tubes; they'll not think it necessary. They figure, of course, we've got to come to them."

"Well," challenged Jack, "haven't we?"

Eliot gazed out the gate along the

road where the shadow of a post placed by the Ancient People lay long and faint upon the ground.

"There goes the sun," he said. "And gosh, it's cold already! But we can burn things to keep warm. It's humiliating as hell; but we can burn old wood or grain, or a thousand things, and keep warm for a while, anyway. Physically, we're not forced to go to *them*; but can we be men—and stay away?"

"THAT'S it," Jack commended his friend. "That's it exactly."

"I know," said Eliot. "I was never so mad in my life as the night when they cut off our light and heat. I could have done anything—if I could have got to them, for it. It was the most infuriating thing I ever felt."

"Are you telling me?" said Jack. "You thought you were alone in that feeling?"

"Of course not; but I can't laugh at it yet. Can you?"

"No; and I never expect to—until I can fix that feeling."

"But how can we fix it?"

"Exactly. How can we? How in the world—how on Bronson Beta, Jack, are we going to be able to get at *them*?"

"Tony'd like to know; but it's got to be without too great a risk. He won't have us killed—not too many, anyway."

"Well, how many of us would he think it worth while to lose, if we took Gorfulu?"

"Do you think you know how to do it? . . . Whew, that chill certainly comes on."

"Sun's gone; and damn' little of it there was to go. We simply weren't made to be this far away from the sun."

"Half a year from now, you'll be saying we weren't made to be as near the sun as we'll be."

"If we live till then."

"Yes; and if this cock-eyed world decides to do a decent orbit really around the sun, and not go sliding off into space, as it's done before."

"What makes you say that? Do you think Duquesne and Effenstein are giving us a run-around? They say we're coming back, and too close to the old sun for comfort."

"Yes," agreed Jack. "But do they *know*? Does anybody know until the old apple does it—or doesn't do it? Somebody certainly must have told the people who built these cities that they were going to stay in sight, at least, of some sun; and they certainly took a long

ride in the dark. . . . Hello, here's our relief." And Jack hailed the pair who appeared in the twilight of the street; he passed them his report, "*Everything quiet*," and he started up the street with Eliot toward his quarters.

"WHAT'S the hurry, soldiers?" some one softly hailed from the darkness of a hooded doorway. It was a girl's voice, teasing, provocative.

Both men halted.

"Who are you?"

"Please, soldiers, we're only friends caught out in the dark and needing protection."

Jack laughed, and knew her before he turned on his flashlight. "Marian," he demanded, "what are you doing here, and who's with you?"

Then her companion, Shirley Cotton, made herself known.

"We were hoping," Marian Jackson said, as the two girls walked along with the two young men, "for somebody to come by who knows how to turn on the heat again, not to speak of the lights."

"Were you in that building?" Eliot asked her.

"We were; and I tell you, it's hard to open doors now that the power's off. They stick terribly."

"What were you doing in that building? You know you shouldn't have gone in from the street alone."

"Sure I know," agreed Marian blandly. "But where have we got by obeying all your nice orders?"

"What were you doing, Marian?"

"Shall we tell them, Shirley?"

"Why not?"

"Well," said Marian, speaking carefully as though she might be overheard, "we decided we'd see what we could do as baits."

"Baits?"

"Baits. The chunks of meat trappers used to put in traps, and like minnows on hooks—baits, you know. My idea."

"Then," said Jack generously, "it must have been a pippin. Baits. I've got the general underlying scheme of your girls now; go on."

"But there's nothing to go on to; nothing happened."

"The fish didn't come?"

"No nibble. No. But give us time, boy. There's some way, we know, by which somebody still gets in and out of this city. The idea is, we hope he—or they, if they're two of 'em—will try to grab us. We'll go along."

"Sabine-women stuff, Eliot," Shirley put in.

"What?" asked Marian Jackson.

"I'll tell you later, dear," Shirley offered.

"Oh," sniffed Marian. "Deep stuff! Well, anything they didn't teach in the first six grades of the St. Louis grammar schools is lost on me. Still, you got me curious. What did the Sabine women do, Shirley?"

"They went along," Shirley told her, "with the men from the other city, who grabbed them."

"And then what did they do, darling?"

"They stayed with them as willing little wives."

"No stabbing after they found the way in and out?"

"No," said Shirley. "That's where the Sabine women were different."

Jack Taylor whistled softly. "So that's what you little girls were up to?" he said. "Perhaps it's just as well we came along. But they rather show us up, eh, Eliot?"

**D**INNER was a moody meal in the evening of that prolonged day. The natures of the people from earth had not adjusted themselves to the increased length of both day and night; most of the people still slept, or at least went to bed, for eight hours of each twenty-four, so they dozed by day and were awake, on the average, sixteen hours of each period of darkness.

Philbin had learned that this had not been the custom among the ancient people; they had passed through the stages of evolution adapted to the long day and night; but it appeared impossible for the people from earth to acquire this adaptation.

Accordingly, after dark, there were long, restless periods; and tonight Eliot James, Jack Taylor and Peter Vanderbilt, with two more of the younger men—Crosby and Whittington—met for a midnight discussion.

Tony was not called to this informal council of his friends; nor was Ransdell; for Tony, though personally the same with all of them, yet was Chief of the Central Authority; he bore the responsibility; and if he forbade the enterprise on foot, his friends could scarcely proceed. So it was agreed not to let him know. And Ransdell, too—being charged with the security of the city—had better learn about the plan much later.

The five had gathered in Vanderbilt's quarters—which were not cramped, to

say the least. There was no need in that city, constructed on its splendid scale for some two millions of people, for anyone now to be niggardly of room. Each of the emigrants from earth could choose his own dwelling-place, so long as it was approved for its security.

Peter Vanderbilt had chosen what would have been called, on earth, a penthouse—a roof-dwelling, built, he was sure, by some connoisseur of living.

The place delighted Peter; it was on a roof but near an edge of the city where the shield sloped steeply down; so the roof there was not high, and was easily reached by foot, after the power failed.

Also it was especially well adapted for habitation in the present emergency when the heating apparatus prepared for the city had failed or rather, had been cut off. For the original builders had allowed for no such emergency; they had been dealing with elements respecting which they had no reason to allow for that factor of failure—the internal heat and radio-activity of the core of the planet. Stoppage of that was unthinkable; and so, to them, was the cutting of the power-conduits to any of the cities. Therefore they had supplied no alternative heating arrangement.

As a consequence the present tenants had to employ the most primitive methods of keeping themselves warm in these lovely supercivilized chambers. They were driven to build bonfires in some of the great halls; but they spared those of exceptional splendor.

Peter Vanderbilt, being on the roof in his "penthouse," had contrived a chimney and a fireplace which gave him heat without much smoke or soot.

**I**T was before this fire that the five gathered.

"Wonderful place you have, Peter," said Whittington, looking around. He had not visited it before, and he went about examining the metal panels of mountain, woodland, marsh and sea, all splendid in the colors of enamel paints baked on.

Peter asked him: "Are you complimenting me? All I've done is to choose it. . . . Do you know, not a thing was flecked or rubbed, not a thing was worn. The man who made it never used it."

"It seems so with most of the buildings," said Whittington. "It seems they must have gone on building them to complete their plan, after they knew they themselves would never fill them."

"What else could they do," asked Eliot, who had thought much about this, "while they waited? Could they just wait—for slow annihilation?"

"Philbin," said Vanderbilt, "rendered a couple of lines of his poem 'Talon.' He says it gives no idea of the enormous melancholy of the original; but as he said modestly, it is better than no translation at all:

*"And now the winds flow liquid,  
The sole cascades to seek the sea.  
At last these awful streams themselves are  
hardened.  
The air that once was breath is metal, frozen.  
Where, then, are we?"*

NOBODY spoke until Taylor, after a moment, put wood on the fire.

"Did you hear, Peter," he questioned, "what those girls—Marian and Shirley—were out to do?"

"Yes," said Vanderbilt; and the five got immediately at the problem of how to gain entrance and control of Gorfulu.

"Seidel is in command, Von Beitz is sure," Eliot James said. "Cynthia agrees that is most probable. He was pushing aside Morkev, who was nominally chief Commissar—he called himself that—when Lady Cynthia escaped.

"Von Beitz says that Seidel supplanted Morkev but did not kill him; Morkev had too many friends. It is perfectly certain that there are two factions among our friends the Midianites, which is complicated, of course, by their racial mixture. Their position is further complicated by the English, who obey them only because they must.

"Cynthia has told us, and Von Beitz has confirmed it, that the mixture on top is constantly afraid of what they call 'a rising of the serfs'—that is, the English. They guard against it. The English are allowed to gather—even for work—only in very small groups, and always under supervision."

"It looks like a set-up," observed Whittington, optimistically, "if once we get in."

Vanderbilt shook his head. "Eliot specialized, in that speech, on their elements of weakness. Their strength is utter ruthlessness. I believe that, when they attacked your camp," he said to Eliot James, "you killed a good many of them, and some of the most violent fell. But enough were left. Von Beitz says that Seidel keeps himself surrounded by them. He has no use for the milder men. He has a despotism which he completely

controls by intimidation; and no form of government is more merciless and efficient—at least at first. And this is very early in the life of this particular despotism."

"There is a building which they call the Citadel," Jack Taylor said, as if he had heard none of this. "It held the offices of administration of the Old People. Seidel occupies it with his inner ring.

"If three of us could get in—or two of us—and kill ten of them,—the ten top men, including Seidel,—we'd—"

"What?"

"We'd at least be able to start something," Jack ended somewhat weakly.

"But the two of you would have to kill the ten of them and the top ten—before you could really begin," said Peter Vanderbilt quietly. "How simple you make it seem!"

Jack Taylor swore, and then laughed. "We don't know what we could do; or what we'd have to do. But we do know this: some of us, somehow, have got to get into that city, and that Citadel of that city. Then we can trust to God and what chances He may offer us. But first, and whatever's before us, we're going to get in! Agreed?"

"Agreed!" said all voices, and Vanderbilt's was distinct among them.

"Now how? We've no chance to advance against them by air or on the ground—or under the ground from the direction of this city. We know they've got guarded all the conduits and passages which we've discovered; and probably some we don't know about. But would they guard the conduits from the other cities?"

"That's something, Jack! Say—"

"See here. There's Danot—on the other side of them from us. They've a guard in there; we've nobody. They'd never look for us to come from that quarter. We get into Danot and go underground! We—"

That night was long, but not long enough for the five conspirators.

## CHAPTER XX

### JUSTICE BALANCES THE SCALES

RANSDELL, on the evening of the third day later, reported to Tony: "Five men have not returned—three of our best friends, Tony," he said, dropping formality. "Eliot, Jack Taylor and Peter Vanderbilt—and Whittington and

Crosby with them. They left, you know, in two 'larks' about two hours before dusk yesterday. They said they were only going to have a look around. I thought it was a good idea; I told them to go."

"No word from them at all since?" Tony asked.

"Not a syllable. Marian Jackson is missing too."

"She went with them?"

"No. Entirely separately; and she went on the ground, not in the air. The gate watch who let her go out—it was Cluett—was ashamed of himself and did not report it promptly. It appears that she drove to the gate in one of the small cars, and wheedled Cluett into letting her take a turn outside. It was near noon, and the sun was shining. He saw no harm and let her pass. Then she turned the battery on full, and streaked away.

"Still he thought she was just fooling with him, and would return, probably by another gate; so he sent no one after her. But as far as we're concerned, that was the end of her."

"Which gate?" asked Tony briefly.

"The northern gate. Duquesne's Porte de Gorfulu."

"She disappeared down that road?"

"Yes. And the only word she left behind with the girls she knew was that she was tired of being cold; she thought she'd try being warm again. She commented, further, that she sees now she pried herself into the wrong party."

Tony nodded; he knew what that meant. Marian frequently reminded everybody that she hadn't been selected among the original company for either Hendron's or Ransdell's space-ships; she had "pried herself into the party." Obviously, she meant she wished she had chosen the ship of the Asian Realists who now held the capital city, Gorfulu.

"Have you searched for her?" asked Tony.

"I've flown myself," Dave said, "along the road more than halfway, to be sure she wasn't wrecked by the road."

"Probably," said Tony, "she went right on. But do you think the others were up to anything foolish?"

"I'm sure of it," Ransdell answered.

"Why? Did they tell you?"

"Not me—Higgins. And he's just told me. Tony, they're dead now; or they're trying to get into Gorfulu from Danot. From what they told Higgins,—who swore to keep it until tonight,—we can't possibly help them now, except by being



She stabbed him as he reached for her. He staggered back, cursing her—and died.

ready to respond to their signal that they're in Gorfulu and will have a gate open for us."

Tony rose excitedly.

"From what they told Higgins, and he told you, is the signal—overdue?"

"It is, Tony; that's the trouble. I don't know in detail what those—those glorious idiots tried to do; but the signal, Tony, is overdue!"

FOUR of them, at that moment, were alive. Crosby was dead; they had his body with them. Of the four alive, not one was unwounded; and they were lying in the dark in the tube of the power-conduit between Danot and Gorfulu, and with both ends of the tube closed against them.

They had taken Danot; at least, they had surprised one gate and got in. For they had grounded their larks in the valley beyond Danot, and accomplished this in the twilight, unseen. Then they had crept to the western gate, surprised the guard and got in.

Two of the other side fell in this fight; and Crosby and Taylor were shot. Jack still could walk, but the others had to drag Crosby with them.

Once inside, they met their bit of luck—or they thought it that. Four men had been at the gate they surprised; and the two that fled separated. James and Whittington took after one of them, leaving Vanderbilt with the wounded men. The luck was that the man they pursued fled to the conduit-tube which supplied Danot from Gorfulu.

They caught that man in the tube, overpowered him; and Whittington went

back to guide Taylor and Vanderbilt and help him with Crosby. Meanwhile, Eliot had found the work-car which traveled in the tube beside the great cables to the transformers. It was part of the equipment made by the Other People which the Midianites were using when they traveled back and forth.

The five had hardly got into the tube; and Vanderbilt was helping Crosby to the car, when the man who had escaped led another group of the guard underground. Eliot and Whittington turned back to fight them; and Vanderbilt and Taylor turned too.

It was revolvers and knives and iron bars—anything was a weapon at close quarters.

Everybody was wounded; but the five got away on the car, with Crosby dying. Power was on; and lights were on. The whole tunnel was illuminated; and the track of the car in the huge conduit was clear.

Eliot James put on the power, full. He saw the chance to surprise Gorfulu; he saw the probability, too, that some signal might be sent ahead by the survivors of the fight in the tube.

But there was a chance—a chance!

SO Eliot opened it wide, and they sped on—the four living men wounded, and one dead, on the car to catch by surprise the city that controlled the continent and which the enemy from earth held.

For two hours they traveled thus.

Then—the lights were extinguished; the car rushed on in a Stygian cave. But the car's speed was slowing; the power that propelled it was shut off.

It did no good for Eliot to thump the control; the power was gone; the car slid to a stop.

So there they lay underground in the tube, without light or food or water; one dead, four wounded. It seemed senseless; yet the only thing left was for the wounded to crawl the rest of the way to the chief city held by the enemy. . . .

Marian Jackson's situation was not in the least like theirs. Marian had driven by broad daylight to the chief gate, and shown herself and begged admittance.

Marian was exceedingly good-looking; and the guard who parleyed with her had the good sense to take her at once to his superior, who knew that his business was to show her to Seidel.

Seidel spoke English; Marian's "line," as well as her appearance, pleased him.

She pointed out that the American parties—both of them from both ships—were composed of fools. She congratulated herself that she had not been chosen by them to join them; she had made them take her.

This was true; and Seidel had learned that it was true, from his spies in the city. Marian was tired, she said, of nineties from America who had chosen themselves to people this planet. They couldn't even keep themselves warm!

Seidel had Marian assigned to quarters close to his in the Citadel.

DURING the second day, she got a good view of the local situation, learning, among other things, that Seidel had taken very clever measures to protect himself against the always-feared uprising of the serfs: All the outer rooms surrounding his suite were equipped with sprays which, upon pressing a lever, spread stupefying and paralyzing gas—the same gas which the Midianites had used in the attack on Hendron's camp.

Also, Seidel had learned the use of *klul*. Indeed, he was addicted to *klul*, but he had let no one but the chemist who supplied him with the drug, know it.

However, he let Marian know.

Marian pretended she had never heard of it before. How would she, among the Americans, who were only fools? The fact was, Marian had tried it out pretty thoroughly, and was proud of the fact that she had a pretty good "head" for it.

Seidel thought it would be very amusing to induct Marian into the uses of *klul*. It was most pleasant and effective, he had found, when breathed in a warm, almost steamy atmosphere. He liked to let it evaporate beside the bath, then to lie in the bath, breathing the *klul*-drenched air. He had a marvelous bath in his suite in the Citadel. The Ancient People had built a pool which could be heated to any temperature—a beautiful, enamel-tiled pool with gay decorations.

Seidel insisted that Marian swim with him alone in the lovely pool and breathe *klul*. He dismissed his attendants and led her in.

The *klul*, in its big basin, was rapidly evaporating in the warm, steamy air.

Marian kept herself covered with a single garment like a kimono.

He ordered her to throw it off and bathe with him. She asked; first, to breathe more *klul*; and she pretended that she was very intoxicated.

She danced and delighted Seidel, who



ordered her to throw off her garment and dive into the water with him.

"Why do you keep it clutched about you?" he demanded.

In a moment, she showed him; for he tried to tear off her kimono, and she let go with her hand, which had been holding, under the cloth, a knife.

She stabbed him as he reached for her. She left the dagger in him as he staggered back. He cursed her, and found his alarm signal before he pulled out the knife, threw it at her—and died.

Marian heard them at the door. For a moment she was dizzy; perhaps the *klul* was affecting her. She picked up the knife, with which she had killed him, and armed herself with it again. Then she remembered the protection he had prepared for himself against the uprising of the serfs.

She pulled the lever that sprayed all the outer rooms with the stupefying gas—the rooms filled with his friends, the most dependable and trustworthy of those who had supported him.

THE signal promised by the five—if they succeeded—did not come to Hendron-Khorlu. It became longer and longer overdue.

At dawn Ransdell set out to fly toward the capital city and toward Danot beyond it; but on the way he met another plane.

A lark, it was—one of the machines of the Vanished People flown by another pilot from earth; and Ransdell, not seeking encounter, was avoiding it when he saw that the passenger—or observer—in that plane was standing, waving to him.

Ransdell swung about, and curiously, yet keeping a cautious distance, pursued the plane, which was making straight for Hendron.

It landed on the field outside the city; and Dave followed it down.

Two men stepped out; and it was evident that the passenger was watching the pilot; the passenger was armed; the pilot was not.

Ransdell and Waterman, who was with him, approached the pair; and the passenger, forgetting his watch of the pilot, hurried to them.

"You're the Americans?" he hailed them in English; more, he spoke like an Englishman.

"Yes!" called Ransdell. "Who are you?"

"Griggsby-Cook! Once Major Griggsby-Cook, of the Royal Air Forces!"

"Where from?" challenged Ransdell wonderingly.

"Where from?" repeated the Englishman. "Out of slavery, I'd say! I came to tell you. We've taken over the city, since that girl of yours stabbed Seidel and gassed the rest of the ring! We've taken over the city!"

"Who?" demanded Ransdell; and answered himself: "Oh, you mean the English! Then Taylor and James and Vanderbilt and the five of them got in!"

"The five?" repeated Griggsby-Cook. "It was a girl that got in! She did for Seidel in his bath—like Charlotte Corday with Marat!"

"Then she gassed a lot more. . . There was nothing to it when we got wind of that, and rose against them. I say, we've quite taken over the city! I buzzed off to tell you chaps. Didn't take time to learn the trick of this plane myself; so I pistoled one of their pilots into taking me. But he's good now, isn't he?"

Ransdell nodded; for the pilot was meekly waiting.

"Oh, they'll all be good!" said Griggsby-Cook confidently. "They'll have to be."

"But the five—the five men that went from here?" Ransdell persisted.

"Know nothing of them!" said the Englishman. "Sorry."

Then no one spoke; but the four of them stared, as in the dim gray dawn, the great dome of Khorlu began glowing, and illumination showed in the streets too.

"The lights are coming on!" Ransdell exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes," said the Englishman. "We were working at that; they hoped to get the power to you before I got here!"

IT was only a little later that the same English engineers restored the power-supply to Danot, which had been cut off for reasons unguessed, until they had searched the tunnel and found one dead and four wounded Americans.

Tony Drake, on entering the capital city, went first to the hospital rooms where Eliot and Jack Taylor and Whittington and Peter Vanderbilt lay. They would all "pull through," the English surgeon promised; but he could not say so much of others under his care; for the uprising had cost, on both sides, thirty lives; and ten more of the wounded would not recover.

But battle on Bronson Beta was over—at least for the present. Further contest was unthinkable; yet it was pre-

vented only by the overpowering numbers of the Americans and English together, when compared to the still defiant few of the "Asian Realists." Some score of these had to be confined; but all the rest were reconciled to the government that was being arranged by the Americans and the English.

They were gathered all together in Gorfulu; and they were going to have a great meeting to discuss and agree upon the form of government.

Marian Jackson sat with the men on the committee; for surely she had earned the right; but she had not, as she herself proclaimed, "the first ghost of a glimpse of government."

What was it to be?

Some suggested an alternate dictatorship, like the consuls of Roman republic, with an American consul alternating in power with an English. Others declared as positively that all rivalries and jealousies of the shattered earth should be forever banished and denied.

There were a score of other schemes.

And more debate than ever before on manners and morals—especially about marriage. Should there be laws for love? Cast off conventions and taboos! All right; try to get along without any. . . .

Tony retired to the lovely apartment provided in the capital city for Eve and himself; he was very tired. The day had been dark and long, and outside the shield of the city, very cold.

It was neither dark nor cold within; for the power-plant more than supplied needed heat and light. The people were provided with every material thing.

"And today," said Tony to his wife, "we ascertained beyond possible question that this planet stays with the sun. Today we passed aphelion, and have definitely begun to approach the sun again. Life here will go on."

"Our life together, Tony!"

He kissed her more tenderly for his child within her.

"I've not dared think too much of—our son, Eve. But now it seems certain he'll come into a world where he can live. But what strange, strange things, my dear, he is sure to see!"

Here this great novel ends. . . . But in this connection we expect soon to have an interesting announcement to make. . . . Meanwhile, be sure to read next month "THE ROBOT REBEL-LION," a breath-taking short novel of man-made machines gone mad.

# The Secret

*The story of a strange murder  
and of a mysterious island, by  
the author of the famous Free  
Lances in Diplomacy.*

IT can be hot among the Moluccas in March, five degrees south of the equator. The ship's Dutch passengers lounged about during the middle of the day in gaudy batik pajamas and sarongs, the English and Americans in white-linen trousers, shirts and negligees—all according to custom in the Dutch Indies. Bremerton and Joyce had their deck-chairs lashed to the thwartship-rail right away aft, and were smoking brown-paper cigarettes from Manila, drinking iced limeade, and exchanging a word or two when something aside from the heat occurred to them.

"Been noticing that mate O'Brien, Joyce?" Bremerton asked one day.

"Hmph! Pretty smooth. Thinks well of himself. Civil enough, but superior airs—rat's eyes, too near together. Don't like the way he acts toward the Old Man. Not quite insubordinate, carries out his orders—but with a manner as if for ten cents he'd tell the Cap'n to go to hell. And Tietjen is a decent old chap, too.

"D'ye know, I wonder if the Cap'n hasn't reason for some anxiety. We took aboard a lot of bag-sugar at Ceram before we got to Banda Neira. Tietjen had no space for it but the lower Number Two hold. If we get a lot of water in the bilges, the trickle higher up is going to reach the lower tier of those sugar bags and liquefy the stuff until it goes through the gunny-meshes and lets down another tier which, in turn, liquefies. I may be wrong in the impression, but I doubt if you can pump liquid sugar out through the limbers with the bilge-water—too heavy, likely to clog. If you can't, that heavy stuff shifts with every motion of the boat, and makes a serious risk of her turning turtle if a sea hits her right.

"There's another point which I'd say is bothering Tietjen: Aside from the Dutch, we've got some pretty fine English and American women aboard—and three damfool ones: New York society women who are traveling through the

# of Banda Sea

By CLARENCE  
HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by George Avison

Orient with five or six trunks apiece, and enough jewelry for a Hindu idol. Of course Tietjen is keeping the stones for them in the specie-vault under the pursuer's office, but if there happen to be a few nervy adventurers aboard, they'll have a go at 'em, sure as shooting!"

Joyce had been lazily watching the approach of a great mother billow, rolling majestically up from the Arafura Sea—rather enjoyably anticipating the massive lift of it when it reached the boat. But instead of taking it with a long easy roll, the *Van Joort* appeared to be as sluggish as a fattening hog; when she did finally roll, there was a sound of loose articles sliding down to leeward on the various decks, and she seemed in two minds about ever straightening up again. A slight frown deepened between the American's eyes. He got slowly out of his deck-chair and looked down over the rail at the side-plating.

"Hmph! There's *something* loose in the lower holds, Bremerton! She's certainly a good foot lower in the water than she was at Banda Neira!"

THE chief engineer's head appeared above the coaming of the after-companion as Joyce went below for more tobacco, and Bremerton beckoned him over to the other man's empty chair. The passengers were scattered about under the awning, mostly napping—none of them near enough to overhear what was said between the two.

"Wanted to have a bit of talk with you, Chief. Her Plimsoll's almost under water—and she's moving as heavy as Mark Twain's jumping frog. Can't you get that sugar out of the Number Two with lines of hose down the hatch from a donkey-pump?"

"Py tamm, Mynheer Bremerton! So—you wass not sleeping all t'e time, wass you! I try donkey-pump when it iss dark—will not so mooch alarm t'e women; but t'e donkey will nodd raise t'e



"What do you want? Can't come up here, you know!"

stuff so high—get clog, pesides. W'en she roll, t'e stuff all roll ofer to loo'ard—t'e sta'board hose suck not'ingk but air. W'en she roll t'e o'ter way—same t'ing; pump suck more air as sugar. Lucky eet iss nodd in pallast-tanks, or t'e limbers wouldt clog. You got sense enough not talk wit' passengers—ja?"

"No—I'm just looking ahead to avoid panic, if it can be done. Another point, while you're here: I've been having a quiet look-see at these boats. Number Two and Number Eight are pretty well eaten through with rust. I suppose they might stay afloat for a while if you kept bailing—but there wouldn't be any let-up to it. How about the others?"

"T'ree—fife—six—wass new poats. We indent for t'em last voyage—find 'em

waiting at Surabaya. T'e ot'ers wouldt keep afloat."

"About as I figured it—two boats would carry all the passengers with an officer and four men each. Say, Woormans—has O'Brien been hobnobbing with any of the crew particularly, more than the others?"

"T'ere wass two—ja. My second assistant andt a quartermaster. Vanderberg, t'e second mate, iss fine chap—good navigator, haf no use for t'e mate. I t'ink t'ose two wass all t'e pals O'Brien got—andt t'ey wass cookin' somet'ingk—I dunno what!"

"Noticed the glass—since noon?"

"Yess—put t'at haze andt t'e long oily schwell tell me as much as t'e glass. We get plenty dirty weat'er pefore morn'ingk. Air feels like typhoon comingk—not pad as China Sea, perhaps, but shake-up t'is oldt poat a lot."

Joyce came along the deck to them, and Woormans went below to his engines.

"Say, Joyce! Is it all my imagination—or are you getting a sort of feeling that something's going to happen before long?"

"Frankly, old chap, I'm nervous as a cat! Thought mebbe I'd been smoking too much—one does, out here. There's one thing dead sure: we'll get a blow before morning, and it won't be any zephyr, either. Aside from that—oh, well, I guess I could bear up if I never saw that bird O'Brien again—he sure makes my fur stand out!"

"Got a gun with you?"

"Service automatic I had in France. Why? What's the idea?"

**B**REMERTON looked a bit sheepish. "Hm—blessed if I know. Only I seem to have the same hunch you have! Say! You go belt that gun on under your coat, right now, and put a box of shells into your pocket—I'll do the same. Get a saw, two axes, couple of files, pliers, from the Chief, and stow 'em in the stern of the Number Five boat. Get the second mate off in some corner—tell him in case anything does happen, we want him in command of that same boat—with all the passengers in the Numbers Five and Six—both of which are new. The Two and Eight will leak like sieves! I'll look around quietly for a few other things that'll come in handy in case of emergency. Mebbe we're both plumb silly, buffaloed over nothing—but there seem to be a few



The passengers were stunned by the suddenness of the catastrophe.

symptoms aboard this old hooker that don't look so good—to me. There are some nice women aboard that I don't want to see hurt in any way—yes, and those cute little Dutch kids!"

The *Van Joort* rolled sluggishly on her way, most of the passengers napping through the afternoon in their deck-chairs. A few minutes after eight-bells had gone, the sharp crack of a heavy pistol came from somewhere in the upper part of the boat. Without a motion save a slight turning of their heads toward each other, the two Americans opened their eyes with questioning glances.

"Where was that, Bremerton? Bridge? Captain's cabin?"

"Sounded like that to me—don't believe the other passengers noticed it. If they were all asleep, they wouldn't. Hmph! Let's quietly stroll up on the bridge—and see what happened."

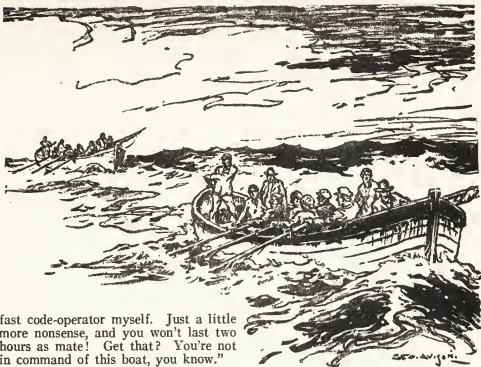
Vanderberg, the second mate, had the watch; but O'Brien was standing at the head of the ladder as they started up it.

"What do you gentlemen want? Can't come up here, you know—against the comp'ny regulations!"

"Talk a bit lower, O'Brien—you don't want to start a panic among the passengers. We're coming up to see about that shot, just now—both of us happen to be large shareholders in the Line, so we'll not argue rules and regulations with you. Was that shot fired in the Old Man's cabin—or wasn't it? Move out of the way, will you!"

"Say! You chaps fancy you're God Almighty, don't you? You heard me say you couldn't come up on this bridge—an' that settles it!"

"Less of that sort of talk, O'Brien! The wireless is working—I'm a pretty



fast code-operator myself. Just a little more nonsense, and you won't last two hours as mate! Get that? You're not in command of this boat, you know."

"Well, Mister—as it happens, I am! Old Tietjen has just blown his brains out! He's been practically out of his head for a week past—something on his mind, I fancy."

"Then you'd better come in with us to look at him. It's very much to your interest to do that, you know—witnesses to verify what you say. And I think we'll have Vanderberg, too. We'll examine the Captain—have a look around his cabin. Where were you when the shot was fired?"

"Just coming up the ladder for a word with the Old Man—Vanderberg was over at the starboard end of the bridge. I asked him who fired the shot, but he didn't know—fancied it was on one of the decks below. Then I opened the Captain's door an' looked in. I'd just closed it when you started to come up."

"All right—come along! We'll go in and have a look at him."

**T**IETJEN was sitting in his swivel-chair at the transom-desk—turned partly around as if speaking to somebody at the door—his right shoulder and head sagged over on the desk; a round blue-black hole started from the center of his forehead. In the right hand, stretched out on the desk, was an automatic—with his thumb on the trigger, and the barrel pointing toward his head. Bre-

merton and Joyce made a careful inspection of the room. The second mate stood over near the body waiting to carry out any orders given him, but his eyes were busy and didn't miss much. Presently Bremerton said:

"Of course in this climate, O'Brien, you'll have to give him a sea-burial—but I think Doctor Boeverie had better come up and go through the Captain's personal belongings—take charge of them. The Doctor is an intimate friend of the managing director at Surabaya. If you'll find Boeverie and send him up here, we'll help him to lay poor old Tietjen out and write memoranda of his stuff. You'll have your hands full looking after the boat, tonight—from the way the glass is acting. If any question comes up outside of the navigating end, better see us about it."

O'Brien was only too well pleased to get out of that gruesome cabin and stay out. He didn't know how much of Bremerton's claim to being one of the owners of the line was pure bluff, or whether the Head Office really would confirm him in any authority he chose to take upon himself—but the American had the quiet assured air of a man who was a power in some part of the world, and O'Brien was satisfied to remain in command of the boat without

argument, even if only for the time being. Vanderberg had remained after he went out, to ask if there was anything they wanted him to do.

Bremerton nodded.

"Yes, Van—we want to show you something. But keep it quiet for the present until we find out what's going to happen. First—look at this gun. Could Tietjen have fired at merely the length of his arm from his head without having powder-burns all over his face? That one point settles it! You were not in here—we saw you on the bridge when the shot was fired. None of the passengers would have attempted going up the ladder, knowing the rules as they do. Nobody else but O'Brien was up here. I'm wrapping up this gun in a bit of newspaper and taking it below where I can blow some flour against it—I got a good camera in my stateroom. I'm also taking along the Captain's sheet of the Banda and Arafura seas, with his copy of the Admiralty Sailing Directions for the Eastern Archipelago. There are duplicates in the chart-room, so you'll not need these for navigating."

AFTER assisting Dr. Boeverie for an hour, they went below and hunted up the purser, Nijhoff, whom they found in his combination office and stateroom opening upon the saloon-gangway. The grilled window through which he did business with the passengers had a steel shutter which was always closed at other times, so that unless he opened his door, nobody could tell whether there was anyone in his room or not. Locking the door, Joyce and Bremerton got down to business:

"Nijhoff, the Old Man's dead—apparently blew his own brains out, from the way things look—which leaves O'Brien in command. Actually—O'Brien shot him in cold blood. He has two cronies aboard who seem to be just about his type. Joyce and I are pretty sure those three are cooking up some way to get the jewels and money in your specie-vault—the jewels alone would run up into the hundreds of thousands. Now—is there any place about this room where that stuff can be hidden if you take it out of the vault under this deck? If it's a place where there's practically no chance for anybody to look, it doesn't need to be protected in any way—you simply take the chance that nobody will look for it."

"Suppose t'ey holdt gun against my belly—ask where iss jewels?"

"Say the Captain came to you yesterday—worried about the stuff, made you get it out, took it all up to his cabin, where he probably had some place to hide it."

"H-m-m—yess—t'at might work. Because I open t'ey vault for t'em—t'ey see he iss empty—I say search my room andt my office. *Ja!* You weesh to know where I hide t'e stuff?"

"No—just as well that we don't. But we do want your promise that you'll take it out of that vault as soon as we leave you. O'Brien and the crew will have their hands full tonight—too full to go after the jewels; but they're figuring out some scheme which is good enough to work under normal conditions."

As the pair left the purser's office, the bugle sounded for dinner. When Joyce had changed his shirt and coat, he stepped along into Bremerton's suite and asked if he was figuring on letting the mate and his cronies succeed.

"Not in the final show-down—hell, no! But just at present we can't do a damned thing. Suppose we have a conference with the Chief and several of the crew—ask 'em to help us chuck those pirates in the brig until we get to port? How do we know that others aren't in cahoots with 'em? How can we prove the murder against O'Brien to convince 'em? We're asking 'em to mutiny against the officer in command of the ship—well, the Chief and Vanderberg are the only two of the lot who would risk it; the rest would obey O'Brien's orders and lock us up instead! Take the passengers: We'd be asking them to back us up against a gang of scoundrels who'll shoot any or all of them without a moment's hesitation—and on account of the women, even if they had the nerve themselves, they won't do it. We've got to play along until we get that gang right—swallow what they say, do what they make us do, until we can hang 'em without any slip-up."

I N spite of the electrically-driven punks, the air in the saloon was breathless; there was an uneasy motion to the long deep-water swell. After dinner there was a coppery color in the sky—black clouds banking up against it. In another hour the typhoon broke upon them—not with the full strength of the China Sea breed, but with plenty to



send many a Malay junk to the bottom. Well-found steamers in these days will stand pretty much anything Father Neptune hatches up, but when one's plates and rivets are bitten with rust, she does take in more water than is good for her equilibrium; and the *Van Joort* had loaded in more of the Banda Sea than her builders ever intended. By morning the typhoon, of which only the outer edge had struck them, disappeared to the eastward, but it left a sea which kept pounding the sides of the logy old craft until evening. Although she was noticeably lower in the water, none of the passengers were apprehensive—they didn't know enough about conditions below to be so.

JOYCE was talking after dinner with the Chief, who was confident that as the sea went down, he would be able to get the liquid sugar out. But at midnight repeated blasts upon the siren brought everyone on deck in more or less panic. The mate told them that there was danger of the water in the holds shifting so suddenly that it would turn the boat upside-down, in which case there would be no possible chance for saving them. With more or less distant islands all around them, a few days in the boats at the most would get them safely ashore. This meant, of course, losing all the baggage they had on board, but he pointed out that the line was perfectly good for all legal claims they brought against it. Joyce asked him if anyone who wished to take the chance could remain on board; but O'Brien saw the trap and dodged it.

"Certainly, Mr. Joyce—but at his or her own risk. Neither the Company nor I will assume any responsibility if they do so." (And Joyce muttered to an acquaintance among the Dutch passengers that anyone who did stay aboard probably wouldn't be alive in the morning. Take that any way you like. He had noticed that the mate was sending everyone but his two cronies off in the boats.)

Vanderberg was in command of the Number Five boat; Woormans had the Number Six—all the passengers being in those two. In the other four, were the stewards, oil-tenders, greasers, deck-hands and petty officers, with a dozen Malays from the Asiatic steerage. When the Five and Six were close together at the start, Bremerton said:

"We're heading a bit east of south for Roma or Damma, Chief, and I think

you'd better come with us—keeping in sight all the time. Let those in the other boats go anywhere they like. They can't go far without hitting something. There's good drinking water on Roma, and a Koninklijke boat from Damma every three months picking up copra, I suppose."

"Ja—andt shell in t'e years when she iss nodt tabu. I say—Mynheer Bremerton—t'ere iss one leetle choke on t'e mate! He haf save' T'e Numper Two andt Numper Eight poats for himself andt his pals!"

"Guess he had other things on his mind and forgot to examine the boats. I hinted to the crew that those two should be left specially for the mate. They supposed it was his order—left the Two and Eight very much alone. There's a life-raft if O'Brien can get back to it after starting in those boats. Hmph! . . . I'll laugh if they drown within fifty feet of the steamer!" . . .

The passengers were stunned by the suddenness and completeness of the catastrophe, as it seemed to them. From sleeping in security on what they supposed a perfectly stanch and comfortable boat, with all the little conveniences of civilization, to finding themselves in open boats with just the clothing and blankets they could hurriedly pick up in the short time they had—with open sea all around them, and possibly death from hunger and thirst before they reached land—that was a jolt. Most of them took it philosophically; but the three New York society women were—much displeased: It was nothing short of an outrage to passengers of their social position—the Company wouldn't hear the last of it for a long time! When the tirade presently subsided, Bremerton quietly said:

"Ladies—I think most of us will agree that the situation rather called for something in the way of comic relief. Thank you very much. Er—Claus! Mina! Come over and sit on my lap for a while—I'll tell you all about the circus."

THE two children, who bravely had been trying to avoid a quiet cry, by themselves, brightened a little and shyly crawled along to him.

"What circus, Mynheer Bremerton—if you please?"

"Why this one, of course! Aren't we all playing at being animals—and acrobats and—er, yes—clowns? And having adventures that we can tell folks about as long as we live? Why—when



"This idol is carved to propitiate some terrible, unknown danger which is taking life after life among the natives."

you grow up and remember this voyage on the old *Van Joort*, you'll say you wouldn't have missed it for anything! And tomorrow—yes, I think before night—we'll probab'ly come to one of those lovely islands you sometimes see in your dreams—with monkeys and parrots and gulls, cool, shady places under the trees—the perfume of beautiful flowers in the air. And when we go ashore, we'll build a big bonfire of driftwood, and have some hot coffee—I'm sure about that, 'cause I put a bag of it in the for'ard end of the boat, myself, with a big

coffee-pot. An' we can dig up clams and fry 'em—"

As the children chuckled delightedly in anticipation, one of the Dutch planters quietly asked:

"Do your fairy dreams ever come true, Mynheer Bremerton? Me—I am nodd so goot sailor. I wondter how can you pe so sure we get to landt again!"

"Oh—I must tell you about that, Mynheer. I fetched with me a navigating chart for these waters—Vanderberg fetched along his sextant and chronometers. When we took to the

boats, we were seventy miles nor'-nor'-west from Damma Island—which has a smoking volcano. Sou'-west of Damma is Roma Island—precipitous in all but one spot, where there's a river-mouth and bay—fine drinking water. There were two small native villages a few years ago, but at last accounts the natives seem to have cleared out for some reason—possibly raided from some other island. Anyhow, there's a string of little islands sixty-five miles south of us, all the way to Timor—don't see how we can miss them. We're going to rig a lug-sail out of the canvas boat-cover—good breeze astern. When the sun gets pretty hot, we'll use the canvas for an awning—row underneath it."

FOR a while those in the boat speculated upon what they might find on whatever island they struck; then they snuggled down as comfortably as they could and went to sleep. With the little sail and the tailwind, the boat made even better time than Vanderberg had hoped—averaging at least eight knots through the night. By ten in the morning an island was in sight off to port, where, according to the Admiralty Sailing Directions, they should have sighted the volcano, whether it was smoking or not. But there was no peak of that sort. The shores were precipitous, with surf breaking against them, the summit appearing to be over a thousand feet high in spots, thickly wooded. Coasting along the western end, they saw no break in the rocky cliffs; nor was there any on the south side. But there was a beach and lagoon at the easterly end, with coral-reefs outside, and in one place there was an easy grass- and bush-covered slope down from the cliff-top.

Rowing in through a narrow but safe opening in the reef, they beached the boats and found a spring of crystal-clear water at the foot of the rocks, with some underground outlet—the pool being about forty feet across and the water trickling down the face of the rock in several good-sized jets. Just outside of the reefs, in very deep water, a rocky islet covered with trees poked eight hundred feet of height above the sea and extended more than two miles along the east coast of the main island, making as lovely a marine view as any of them ever had seen. In no way except its precipitous cliffs did the place resemble the description of Roma.

It certainly was not Roma—not much

over half the length. It wasn't Damma. It wasn't one of the Serwattis. Before sundown they had pretty well explored the top, finding traces of occupation by some of the Melanesian natives, but no living human beings. Animals of various sorts—monkeys, birds, peccaries, a species of iguana. Only a few of the Dutch and three or four of the other men were permitted to go on that first exploration, as nobody knew just what dangers might exist on the island.

When they returned, Dr. Leyden—a famous botanist and anthropologist who had been studying for several months in the wonderful Botanic Gardens at Buitenzorg—presently noticed and carefully examined an immense idol, carved from a single massive tree-trunk, which stood against the base of the cliff, partly hidden by vines. When he had finished his inspection, he took Bremerton and some of the other men aside:

"As you may have heard, mynheers, I make exhaustive study of Melanesian and Polynesian races as well as plants. This idol—I know him very well. He is an idol which is carved to propitiate some terrible and unknown danger which is taking life after life among the natives. When the idol seem not making much impression on the mysterious danger, the natives all clear out, so as to give him all the room he need in the fight. When they come by in proas an' see idol still in same place, they think it still unsafe to come ashore—and go 'way again. So—what that idol say to us is this: 'There is something terrible—very dangerous to human life—on this island.' We do not know what. Perhaps we find out—perhaps not. But we must not relax vigilance night or day—an' we must make our camp some distance away from that idol—preferably on the top-level of the island, because he is down here by lagoon, where natives believe the danger was worst. We saw no snakes in our exploration—so it is not poisonous snake. The animals here are too small for attack unless cornered. However—we take all precautions, and we see."

BREMERTON admitted something like an atmosphere of hidden menace had struck him when they came in and beached their boats—not so noticeable on the upper level, because the monkeys, birds and animals did not seem aware of it. At the top of the cliff where it rose sheer from the lagoon was a grassy

space overhung by a massive ledge of projecting rock to an extent which made it almost a cave and gave complete shelter against rain or wind from west, north or east—a small fissure at the back making a natural and perfect draft for their fire when it was lighted. Before evening the entire party were more or less comfortably settled in the place, the boat-covers screening off a private section for the women, the boats themselves hauled up the beach on rollers, and laid bottom-side-up against the base of the rocks.

THE officers and the Americans noticed the same breathless feeling in the air just before sunset which had preceded the typhoon, and agreed that the storm-center might be working down toward them. When the rest settled down to sleep, Bremerton and Nijhoff were standing watch—being relieved at eight-bells by Vanderberg and the Chief. At four in the morning they told Joyce and Dr. Leyden, who relieved them, that they had heard what sounded like shouts for help down on the beach, and the second mate stole quietly down to the foot of the cliffs while Woermans remained guarding the camp.

The starlight was bright enough to make out the beach and lagoon pretty well, but there was no sign of any human being in sight. After sunrise four of the party went down—and discovered foot-prints indicating that somebody had come down the path in the night to sleep on the soft sand of the beach. They found where he had been lying, with hollows scooped out for his shoulders and hips—and from that spot a large blurred and sprawling track down into the lagoon. It resembled nothing they ever had seen—much wider than the track of a boat being dragged up, but not as deep in the sand.

When they returned to the camp above, some one remarked that nobody had seen Hans Bornje, one of the sailors who had been rowing in the Number Five boat—and asked if they had seen him. Before starting to get a breakfast ready, a party of six went out along the main trail shouting Bornje's name until they reached the other end of the island, but all they heard in response was a chattering of abuse from monkeys and parrots. Dr. Leyden called their attention to the point that if Bornje's body had been lying anywhere in the jungle, the little forest people would have been

deathly quiet in that immediate vicinity—as also they would if the sailor had been walking along through the bush. Shout at a monkey or parrot, and he'll gather his clan to return abuse with interest—but move quietly, and he'll pretend he just isn't there.

By noon it was admitted that Bornje must have been killed down on the beach by the mysterious demon of the island, whatever it might be, and dragged into the lagoon. This was sufficient to dampen the spirits of the entire party and terrorize some of the more nervous women. The men, of course—all but the remaining six of the seamen—were too well educated to believe there was anything supernatural about the occurrence, but they couldn't help speculating as to whether the fish or saurian might not be too big to be put out of business with pistols.

As darkness fell, with the suddenness peculiar to the tropics, zigzag streaks of lightning along the horizon were incessant, the air became more breathless, and the stars were blotted out by a rapidly rising black pall. Then—when all of them were safely huddled way back under the ledge—the typhoon struck the island, tearing up good-sized trees by the roots and hurling them out into the sea, deluging it with torrential rain until streams of water poured down the faces of the precipices on every side. This continued pretty well through the night, until the center of the typhoon whirled off to the east and north on its circular course.

BY sunrise, the force of the wind had subsided; by six bells it had died away entirely, and Bremerton, the Chief and Dr. Leyden came out upon the edge of the cliff for a look around. But their eyes were not above the brow of the precipice when the New Yorker hastily grasped their arms and stopped them from showing any more of their heads. For there below, jammed down upon the inner reef until her bottom-plates were crushed up into her ballast-tanks, was the old *Van Joort*—at least fifty feet of her stern overhanging deep water in the lagoon, and another sixty or seventy feet of her starboard side on the edge of it. Either the size and force of the waves had lifted her completely over a submerged notch in the outer reef, or she had been carried through some narrow opening—slewed around stern-first, lifted on the crests of

the mighty breakers and slammed down upon the inner ring of coral with such force that any salvage of the hull would cost double what it had to build her.

FOR a few moments the keen eyes above examined every foot of her superstructure, but there was no visible sign of life.

Presently Bremerton said: "The Numbers Two and Eight boats are still at their davits—I remember they were securely lashed. The raft was on the turtle-deck aft, and that's gone, evidently washed overboard—pulled those big steel cleats out by the roots when it went. O'Brien and his cronies are still on board if they weren't washed off during the night—which isn't at all likely. They couldn't do anything but steer her ahead of the blow and go it blind—no fire in the Diesels. Well—the first point which must be impressed upon all of the folks is that they mustn't show one inch of themselves where they can be seen from the boat! They must thoroughly understand that O'Brien murdered the Captain, cold-bloodedly. If any one of us gets ashore in a civilized port, he and the other two will hang. They'll shoot us down one by one if they get the chance! There's no blinking that. Those three men know they've got to die unless we do first!

"I think it very likely that our two boats are pretty well covered with sand blown over them at the foot of the rock during the night, so those brutes aren't likely to notice anything that would make them suspect we're here. One of us must remain constantly on watch, night and day, so that we know exactly when they come ashore—which they'll certainly be doing in a few hours. When they do, we don't permit them to come up this path—absolutely not! Fire on 'em if they try it—and shoot to kill. There's no question of humanity involved, any more than there would be with three hungry tigers. Once they catch sight of us, either they kill us, or we kill them. They can go back aboard the boat if they will—but if so, they must set both those leaky boats adrift. I don't think they'll attempt to walk that reef or swim the lagoon—there are spots where they can't pass the surf on the reef, and if they know anything about tropical lagoons, they'll be afraid of poisonous sea-snakes."

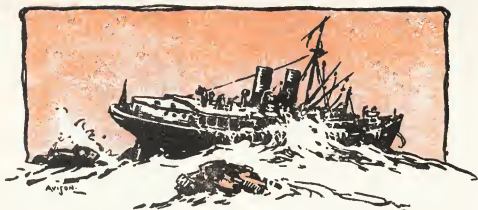
After a breakfast of roast pheasants that two of the Dutch passengers had



managed to snare the day before, washed down with good hot coffee, the women were taken for an exploring trip to the other end of the island by Dr. Leyden and a Batavia man who could warn them what to avoid—while the rest of the men settled down to watch the poor old *Van Joort* in her marine graveyard.

About ten, a puff of smoke from the galley-pipe indicated that the pirates were cooking themselves a breakfast. In an hour they climbed to the upper deck with sea-glasses and examined everything they could see at that end of the island. They evidently had come to a decision while below, for they walked along to where the Number Two boat hung from her davits well aft and began casting off the lashings. When her bottom was just about touching the water of the lagoon, they slid down the falls, lowered her a foot more, cast off the falls and started to row across the lagoon. Even from the top of the cliff, the watchers could see the gleam of water spurting up through the holes in her metal—and it came in so fast that before reaching even the center of the lagoon they had to stop rowing and frantically commence bailing with a rusted tin pan and two caps. But they made no headway; the water slowly gained upon them—before they could reach the beach it was certain that the boat would go down under them, and it seemed evident that all three were poor swimmers. Still they bailed, faster and faster, until they apparently were about exhausted.

Then—to the watchers' horror—a wriggling dark-green thing about the size of a man's thigh, with suckers on the lighter under-side, came over the gunwale of the boat and waved about until it curled around the second engineer's neck and



There, jammed down upon the inner reef, was the *Van Joort*. . . . Lifted on the crests of the breakers and slammed down upon the ring of coral!

pulled him irresistibly into the water, breaking his grip on one of the thwarts as he slowly strangled. Two other snake-like arms came up and curled about the quartermaster's body. As the boat was just about going under, O'Brien dived from its bow and came up facing a horrid massive sac with big goggling eyes which rose in front of him—and he felt great writhing tentacles constricting his own podlike belly—squeezing the breath out of him as a frightful beak approached his face.

TWO of the watchers on the cliff-brow suddenly retched and became violently sick. Bremerton said slowly: "Well—it wasn't at all nice to look at! I'll say it wasn't! But it certainly removed the worst of our dangers. We know now what the tabu is on this lovely island. My gosh! No wonder the natives stuck up old What-d'ye-call-him at the foot of the rocks, and then beat it! I once saw an octopus at Ilo Ilo in the Philippines with tentacles sixteen feet long—never expected to see another that size as long as I lived. But those granddaddies down there who are breakfasting on our former shipmates have got that other one stung by a good five or six feet—measuring their tentacles by the length of that twenty-two-foot boat. Poor Bornje never had a chance when that horror caught him on the beach! I don't know how far they can go out of water, but I'm fairly certain they wouldn't get up to the top of these cliffs unless they had a big pool to plop into when they made it."

Jarvis, the Englishman, said presently: "Really, you know—one can't see that we're so much better off even now,

d'ye see. To be sure, our boats'll not sink under us—an' I fancy, with the axes Bremerton so thoughtfully fetched along, we'd manage to chop off some of those tentacles unless half a dozen of the brutes came at us at once. But there it is—we don't know how many there are! It's not too good—as a sportin' proposition. Of course we'd prefer gettin' aboard the old boat even if she is stuck fast on a reef—unlimited food, our own luggage, baths, tobacco an' what not. But it'll take a bit of doin', you know—at that."

Bremerton spoke up.

"I don't believe the proposition is anything we can't handle, Jarvis. Messy—and unpleasant—all that. But I've a sort of idea we might try it out when the women get back."

By one o'clock the entire party were eating a luncheon under their projecting ledge on top of the cliff. The women were told that the pirates on the boat were dead and that menace removed, but no particulars were given, and nobody made any pretence of regrets which they somehow couldn't feel. Lighting his pipe after the meal, Bremerton sat down on the very edge of the precipice and studied the lagoon below—the greatest depth of which appeared to be directly under him, with water so clear that he could make out patches of white sand or stone in depths which must have been a good ten or fifteen fathoms. Where the water was shallower, there were increasingly lighter shades of greens and browns. Where the almost vertical rays of the sun penetrated the depths and touched different rock-strata, there were iridescent and opaline reflections—large, small and brilliantly-colored fish being



clearly revealed as they slowly drifted about as if floating in air.

In a few moments, he rolled a lump of rock weighing about forty pounds toward him, poising it upon the edge until he had it aimed in a certain direction, and then pushing it off with a vigorous shove. With the momentum gathered in a fall of eight hundred feet, it struck the water with terrific force and went to the bottom like a projectile from a naval gun. As soon as the ripples flattened out, an active movement of large dark masses could be seen in the depths, scurrying this way and that. In two or three minutes, the still wriggling mass of an enormous octopus floated to the surface, its sac-like body crushed to pulp where the stone had struck it.

AFTER another study of the lagoon, Bremerton called for a bit of coöperation in another experiment:

"We beached our boats at the edge of that lightest green patch over there. From here, it looks as if there isn't more than a foot of water all along that light-green—but there's actually ten or more. O'Brien made the mistake of coming straight across the deep center from the boat—but by skirting the southern edge of the lagoon, we can keep in not more than six or eight feet of water all the way round. So what I want to test out is whether noises on the surface of the shallow part will attract those brutes from the depths, or not. Each of you get a pile of stones and heave them in—first, about where we landed—then as much farther as you can throw. Get the idea?"

They thought they did, and commenced the barrage. For a few minutes, nothing happened beyond sending all the fish streaking off to the other side; then, from four different points in the depths, scurrying shadows shot across into the lighter shades of green with almost incredible swiftness. Anyone who has watched small octopi darting for a bit of food under water, either in an aquarium or shallow coastal waters, will have marveled at the amazing speed with which the creatures can propel themselves by sinuous movements of their wriggling arms through the water. Reaching the places where the stones had fallen, the shadows darted from one spot to another, and occasionally lifted squirming arms above the surface—but none of them were sufficiently large to be a serious danger to anyone in a steamer's

boat, the tentacles being apparently not longer than six or eight feet, and four inches in diameter at the thickest part.

They tried a second, third and fourth barrage—until finally the octopi gave it up in disgust and retired to deeper water. More experiments were tried with rocks which it took three men to roll over the edge—in each case stirring up a commotion among vague and horrible shapes in the depths—bringing to the surface mangled remnants of another immense octopus. By that time the New Yorker was satisfied that an attempt to get aboard the *Van Joort* would offer no serious risk, and asked the Chief and Nijhoff whether they were willing to chance it with him. As both had watched in horrified fascination the deaths of the pirates, they would much have preferred not trying it, but they couldn't quite admit that an American had that much more nerve than had Dutchmen.

They reached the trailing falls without mishap, hooked-on, and hauled the boat up to the davits. Then Bremerton said:

"I guess the most important job is to get all the folks aboard this old wreck before sunset, so they'll have a good night's rest with some feeling of security. Er—Wooermans! Most engineers carry with them, aboard, a few sticks of dynamite and a detonator, for blasting sand or rocks in case they get aground. Got any in your motor-room?"

"In t'e storage-lockers—ja, plenty! Plenty wire too, I t'ink."

"Good! Half a dozen sticks should be enough. Bring 'em along to the turtle-deck, aft, with the detonator and three hundred feet of double rubber-insulated wire for under-water use—and some sort of water-tight bag to hold the sticks."

WHEN the Chief had done this, they made the wire-connection, sealed up the dynamite-sticks in a rubber bag with tape and rubber-cement. Whirling it around his head several times, Bremerton let go, the bag shooting upward and outward, taking the wire with it off the coil—until it dropped into the lagoon nearly over the center of the deepest part. Giving it time to sink, the Chief pushed the plunger of the detonator. In three seconds the reef and all that end of the island trembled violently; a fountain of water filled with fish and fragments of various marine creatures roared up a hundred feet into the air. For the

next two hours dead fish, dead sea-snakes, dead lobsters and fragments of all sorts floated up and lay upon the surface of the lagoon, where it took the tides of three days to carry them out through the reef-openings—providing a feast for sharks which came from every direction. Before sunset all the party were once more aboard the old *Van Joort*; and all the women except the impossible three volunteered as cooks for a celebration-dinner.

**B**REMERTON found Woormans and took him up to the radio-shack with Joyce. Here he said:

"As I understand it, Chief, you acted as electrician—no regular wireless-man aboard? Vanderberg stood watch when he could, in the wireless-room, and Cap'n Tietjen put in a few hours each day. What runs the radio-generator?"

"Small engine in t'e motor-room—separate, you understand."

"How long will it take you to give me current? Aërials seemed all right after I overhauled the connections."

"If not'ing was smashed below, I gif you current in fifteen minutes—five kilowatt output from antenna, if you like. T'e set wass best short-wave outfit made in Amsterdam—he work up to range of t'ree t'ousand mile' on one kilowatt if atmospherics wass goodt."

"Give me two kilowatts to make sure."

Joyce was speculatively studying his fellow New Yorker's face.

"I say, old chap! Do you happen by any chance to be the 'Bremerton' of General Minerals? Funny that hasn't occurred to me since we met on board! Where's your yacht?"

"Being overhauled at Kowloon. My sister's cruising in her with friends of ours. Hmph! . . . Come to think of it, you're Joyce of General Aircraft—aren't you? I rather suspected it."

For an hour Bremerton sat there with his hand on the key—calling the letters of his deep-sea yacht in Hongkong harbor—getting occasional chat from other boats and stations—until finally his own operator acknowledged, took down memoranda of their exact position—and estimated that Miss Bremerton would have the yacht at the island in four or five days at the outside. Nothing was said about the wreck.

Hunting up Nijhoff, they went below to the purser's office, where he unbolted a section of the ventilator which went up

through his room from the hold, and hauled up a wire, at the end of which was a large package containing the jewels and bank-notes taken from the specie-vault. O'Brien had blown out the locks, only to find it empty. At Bremerton's suggestion, the purser returned each lot to its former owner, took a detailed receipt—and refused to assume any further responsibility for it. Late that evening the Americans invited Dr. Leyden to Bremerton's suite. After some desultory chat, Bremerton remarked:

"Do you know, gentlemen—I rather hate to leave this place! Like some of the other small islands in the Dutch Indies, it's one of the most beautiful spots on the surface of the globe—I could live here month after month, with perhaps an occasional short trip to the outer world, and be perfectly content. As a business proposition, it's a lot better than even the Batavia Government seems to think. Near as I can figure it, this whole island chain east of Java is more or less volcanic, and the coral bugs have appropriated submarine ledges that looked good to them as foundations—saved 'em a lot of trouble—which, I suppose, is the 'how-come' of the coral-volcanic combination. Anyhow, the island is fairly rotten with some of the most valuable ores! And the Doctor, here, has already found some thirty rare medicinal plants which can be grown in quantity. The mysterious demon of the island is out of business—I doubt if there will be another big octopus in this lagoon for years. What do you suppose the Dutch Government would ask for the island, Doctor?"

**T**HE botanist grinned shrewdly. "Well—if you wass asking t'em, t'ey put up t'e price on you—possibly not sell at all. You wass too well known in financhal circles. But if I wass pay him for botanic investigation—vell, perhaps hundred or hundred fifty t'ousand guilders. She wass tabu—t'ey cannot get any natif lapor on her."

"Hmph! Buy her, will you! Come into a little syndicate with us—Joyce and I will put up half a million if we have to. You put in what you like. Eh? Mebbe we'll end our days here—couldn't find a lovelier spot!"

And that's the end of the story. The other four boats? Nothing more was heard of them. Supposed to have been sent to the bottom by the second typhoon.

Another of Mr. New's inimitable stories will appear in the forthcoming May issue.

# The Soldier's Scrapbook

## The Keys of Jerusalem



COLD, hungry, half-asleep, the colonel stumbling from his tent plodded to the mess-tent on the morning of December 9, 1917. Allenby's army had—culmination of that terrific drive across the Sinai peninsula—pushed last night to the hills surrounding Jerusalem.

But the mess-tent was cold; desolate. "What, what?" snapped the colonel. "No cook? No breakfast? What, what?"

Apologetic, the second in command confessed that the fault was his—he had heard a cock crow before the dawn, and a bright idea had struck him. A cock in a neighboring village meant hens. Hens meant eggs. He had sent the cook to buy eggs.

"Harumph!" rumbled the colonel, rubbing his hands. "Eggs and bacon, what? But why isn't the cook back—what?"

"Here he is, sir!" rose a chorus of voices—expectant voices.

Private—let us call him Stivers—Private Stivers, cook of the battalion officers' mess of the Umpty-umpth London regiment, part of the 60th—London—Division, was emerging from the mist to come to an awkward attention in front of the irate colonel.

"God bless my soul, the man's empty-handed! Where the devil are the eggs?"

"That's wot h'I said, sir, beggin' the colonel's pardon. But h'all the ruddy beggars 'ad was keys—a bunch o' clink-in' keys. H'I didn't want no keys! H'and one bleedin' duffer tried to kiss me, so 'e did! Private Stivers was righteously indignant. "Right down there h'it was." And he pointed, *away* from the cock-crowing village and toward Jerusalem. "H'opened a gate in the wall, they did, h'and come bulgin' h'out. The beggar in the kerridge 'e 'ad the keys! Awsked me was h'I General H'Allenby, 'e did, 's'truth!"

The colonel gazed at his officers.

"Gentlemen," said he, softly, "Jerusalem has fallen!"

Hot were the telephone wires to 180th Brigade headquarters. In five minutes an eager brigadier general, with one lone orderly behind him, was galloping hell-for-leather toward the Jaffa Gate, where a timid assemblage of citizens, the mayor

in their midst, received him with obsequious bows, led him inside the portal, and from the base of the Tower of David turned over to the happy general the keys of the Holy City. The brigadier received them with a short speech, and again at top speed came galloping back to his headquarters—where his adjutant stammeringly informed him that the word had been passed on to the major general commanding the London Division and that *he*, in person, would receive the surrender of the city.

Back went the brigadier, hurriedly pushed the keys into the hands of the mayor, and unostentatiously got out of the way just as a long, sleek automobile bearing the division commander came tearing up the Jaffa road. For the third time that morning the mayor of Jerusalem, bowing low, presented his keys. For the second time that morning an applauding crowd of citizens gathered to see a resplendent British general officer accept the surrender.

Beaming, his precious keys jingling in his hands, the major general stepped out of his automobile at his headquarters, and over the telegraph sent the following joyous message to General Allenby:

"I have the honor to report that I have this day accepted the surrender of Jerusalem!"

Not so beamingly the major general read the answer that ticked back, sizzling:

"General Allenby will himself accept the surrender of Jerusalem on the 11th inst.; make all arrangements!"

For the third time that day the rotund little mayor of Jerusalem, in frock coat and tarboosh, received the keys of his city back again, much to his puzzlement. Funny people, those English!

HOW, on December 11, 1917, two days after Private Stivers went for eggs, the conquering Allenby received the formal surrender of the city, is history.

It was two weeks later that the mayor of Jerusalem died, of pneumonia. Private Stivers, bending over his cook-stove, received the news with a sniff.

"Caught 'is ruddy deff of cold, 'e did, 'andin' h'over keys. H'I told 'im h'I wanted h'eggs, an' not 'is ruddy city!"

*This fine detective novelette is different—for the author takes the reader entirely into his confidence, "holding out" nothing. Mr. Parkhill will be recalled for "Nobody's Yes Man."*

# Death

By FORBES

AT the first stroke of midnight Levi McLean, wealthy elderly political dictator, opened the door of the library in his palatial suburban home and saw young Valdo Clein crouching in front of the wall safe.

At the second stroke, McLean sprang to the side of the carved walnut table and whipped an automatic pistol from the drawer.

At the third, young Valdo Clein, an oath bursting from his lips, leaped to his feet and twisted about so suddenly that he almost wrenched the gardenia from the lapel of his dinner-jacket.

At the fourth, blonde and attractive Beth Caruth, alone on the loggia outside, heard the oath and, startled, ceased the impatient twisting of her dinner ring and made for the French windows.

At the fifth, Valdo Clein sprang at the man who had trapped him in front of the safe, and snatched at McLean's gun arm.

At the sixth, a shot rang out, Levi McLean's body jackknifed forward, the pistol dropped to the Oriental rug, and Valdo Clein darted for the door opening upon the breakfast-room.

At the seventh, Beth Caruth stepped through the French windows, saw the body and the pistol, caught a fleeting, shadowy profile glimpse of a fleeing man with a gardenia on his dinner-jacket lapel, clutched at her throat, and gasped almost inaudibly: "*Rick! Rick Benton!*"

At the eighth, she ran to the side of Levi McLean, knelt, and shuddered as she looked down into open, staring and glassy eyes.

At the ninth, she heard footsteps of a running man approaching in the corridor without.

At the tenth, she snatched up the pistol and whirled toward the French windows so swiftly that the strap snapped on one of her frail high-heeled slippers.

At the eleventh, the house-man burst in, an instant after she had fled, and found McLean's body.

At the twelfth, he snatched the phone from its cradle and croaked frantically:



At the seventh stroke of the clock Beth caught a glimpse of a fleeing man with a

# *for Cinderella*

PARKHILL

Illustrated by  
R. F. James



Caruth stepped through the French windows, saw the body and the pistol, gardenia on his lapel, clutched at her throat and gasped: "Rick! Rick Benton!"

"Police—*police!* Send the police! Mr. McLean is murdered!"

THE police siren screamed. The radio patrol-car skidded as it turned into the graveled driveway, and the brakes shrieked as it slid to a halt in front of the loggia. Two uniformed patrolmen spilled out. The siren faded to a moan, to a whisper, to silence. But the radio kept on blatting a faint and thrice-repeated call for Patrol Car Twenty-eight.

"What's the trouble here?" barked one of the officers, scowling.

Most of Levi McLean's week-end house guests were huddled in an excited group on the loggia. Valdo Clein pushed his way to the front. The gardenia was missing from the lapel of his dinner-jacket. He smoothed back his sleek yellow hair with his left hand. He flicked at the tip of his cigarette with the little finger of his right hand, but there was no ash there. The cigarette had just been lighted. Valdo Clein was the only one who betrayed no excitement. He appeared to be in complete command of the situation. He said:

"Levi McLean has been murdered."

"Levi McLean? Why, he—"

The swelling whine of another police siren interrupted the officer. Another car skidded through the gate, swung up the driveway and slid to a halt. Two more men got out—two men in plain clothes. One of them was big, homely, with high cheek-bones and tiny eyes, and he chewed gum and wore his derby tilted far forward. One of the coppers said: "He's Detective Sergeant John Garth, of the hommy squad."

Detective Sergeant John Garth of the homicide squad wiggled his once-broken nose with stubby fingers, and demanded:

"What's coming off here?"

Valdo Clein blew at his cigarette until it glowed, and answered:

"Levi McLean has been murdered."

"Yeah?" said Detective John Garth.

"Levi McLean? Why, he's the biggest power in—"

A third car skidded through the driveway and shrieked to a halt. Two more men tumbled out. One carried a huge camera. The other was a sallow young man with a long nose and drooping eyes. "Quinn, of the *Trib*," explained the patrolman.

"What's the difficulty?" barked Quinn of the *Trib*.

Valdo Clein smoothed his sleek yellow hair and said:

"Levi McLean has been murdered."

"Hot ziggety!" popped Quinn of the *Trib*. "Levi McLean? Why, he's the biggest power in politics in this State! 'Statesman-Maker Slain,' eh?"

Beth Caruth, wholesome, charming, but at the moment striving to curb the rapid breathing born of excitement and fright, eased unnoticed into the group, from the rear. She was wearing another pair of slippers now. Slender, nervous fingers twisted feverishly at her dinner ring.

"Who killed him?" demanded Detective Sergeant John Garth of Valdo Clein.

"My dear chap," shrugged Clein in faint protest, "that's what we want you to find out. No one knows who killed him. We all heard the shot. The houseman discovered his body in the library. If you'll come with me, I'll be glad to show—"

He was now interrupted by a blinding, instantaneous flash of light. He started violently. So did Beth Caruth. Two of the feminine house-guests screamed.

"Them newspaper boys and their flashlight pitchers are enough to drive a body nutty," said Detective Sergeant John Garth. His words all bore a nasal twang. "Okay, buddy—where is this house-man? And the body?"

VALDO CLEIN gestured toward the French windows with his cigarette.

"This way, my dear chap. I told the house-man to guard the room—to permit none to enter until the police arrived."

"Just a sec," said Detective John Garth. But Valdo Clein already had vanished through the French windows. Garth turned to the uniformed patrolmen. "Listen, Otto: You and Harry better watch this joint, back and front. You'll have three more cars here any minute, to help you. Don't let anybody leave, without I know it, see? Of course, if anybody makes a break, you know what to do."

He turned to his plain-clothes partner. "Murdo, you better stick by these glass doors opening onto the porch, and don't let anybody inside."

"Except me," put in Quinn of the *Trib*, wiggling past the guard.

"You make me sick," Detective John Garth told him. "You newspaper guys are just like lice. Five minutes more, and they'll be a million of you swarming round. . . . Where's the body?"



"Right here," Valdo Clein told him. "Hum," frowned Detective Sergeant John Garth. He knelt by the body and wiggled his nose. "Hum. . . . Bullet went in right side, and through heart. Musta died quick—like that! . . . Powder burns. Close. . . . Where'bouts at is that house-man?"

The servant stepped forward, rubbing his hands together nervously.

"Here I am, sir."

"Yeah. I see. Tell me just what happened."

"I was at the other end of the corridor, sir, when I heard the shot. *Bam*—just like that, sir! I ran in here, sir. And found Mr. McLean—murdered! I called the police, sir, and that's all, sir."

"Yeah. I see. You heard 'em wrangling before you heard the shot?"

"Me, sir? Oh, no sir. Nothing like that, sir!"

"You saw somebody running from the library, afterward?"

"Oh, no sir! Not at all! They—he—the murderer, I mean—must have escaped through the French windows, sir—or the door to the breakfast-room."

"Oh, yeah? Take a look at them powder-burns, will you? Now, tell me how you know he was murdered! How d'you know he didn't kill himself?"

The house-man blinked. His jaw dropped.

"Why—why, you're right, sir. I never thought of that! It must have been suicide, sir!"

"Where's the gun?"

"The gun?"

"Yeah, the gun. You have to have a gun to make a bullet-hole, like this!"

"Why, I didn't see the gun, sir! And I searched the room quite carefully after I phoned the police."

Valdo Clein put in: "That's the truth, Sergeant. I arrived a moment later. I directed him to search the room, and then I ran out to tell the other guests."

"I want that gun!" rasped Detective Sergeant John Garth harshly. Beth Caruth, peering through the French windows with the other guests, was pressing her left hand against her side, as if to still the thumping of her heart. "If Levi McLean killed himself, the gun would be within a yard of the body." He leveled a blunt finger at the servant. "Where's that gun?"

Valdo Clein was showing his first sign of perturbation. He had seen the pistol drop to the Oriental rug. Now it had vanished. He had not seen Beth Caruth



At the twelfth stroke of the clock, the house-man snatched the phone and croaked frantically: "Police—police! Send the police! Mr. McLean is murdered!"

appear just as he had darted through the door. He could not account for the disappearance of the weapon. He crushed his cigarette in an ash-tray.

The house-man's lip quivered. "Honest, sir, I don't know. You see, sir, the young gentlemen and ladies were dancing in the reception-hall, to the tune of the radio, and—"

"A party, eh?"

"A week-end house party, sir. Given by the young master, sir. Young Mr. Benton—Mr. McLean's nephew and only living relative, sir, since the mistress died last winter, sir."

Detective Sergeant John Garth frowned and fingered his misshapen nose.

"Yeah, I know. Young Rick Benton, the radio-announcer. Everybody knows who *he* is. I never seen him, but I heard him, plenty." He turned to Valdo Clein and began: "Mr. Benton, I wish you'd—"

"Pardon," broke in Valdo Clein, smiling faintly. "I am not Rick Benton. I am Valdo Clein. One of the guests."

John Garth scowled. "From the way you seemed to be running things around here, I figured you for the old man's nephew. I oughta of known better, 'cause your voice isn't snappy and crackly enough for Rick Benton. Which of you is Benton?"

The house-man said: "Mr. Benton has not returned yet from the broadcasting

studio, sir. Customarily he leaves the studio at eleven o'clock, and reaches here some fifteen minutes later. But tonight—he must have been delayed, sir. It is most unusual for him, sir. Doubtless he can explain it to your full satisfaction, sir. I'm sure he can explain it, sir!"

THE flash-bulb flared suddenly again. Everybody blinked, and most of them glared at the photographer.

"Swell shot, Ralph!" said Quinn of the *Trib* to his photographer. "It'll knock 'em cold on P. 1 in the morning. 'X Marks Spot Where Mystery Assassin Shot Down Political Czar.' Hot zig-gety!"

Detective Sergeant John Garth scowled. "You guys do that again, and I'll have you tossed out on your ear!"

"Ralph," Quinn of the *Trib* said to the photographer seriously and quite audibly, "as long as they got John Garth on the job, they got this case sewed up. The killer can't get away—not with John Garth on the case. No scientific flubdub about Detective Sergeant John Garth. Just plain, common horse sense. And—oh, yes! Guts."

John Garth snorted and poked a stubby forefinger at the servant.

"Rick Benton and his uncle always get along okay? Have little fusses now and then maybe, about—say, about Rick spending too much money? Or about his sweeties, maybe?"

"Oh, no sir! I have never known them to quarrel, sir! I can truthfully say I never heard a harsh word pass between them!"

"Oh, yeah? They're the first kinfolks on record, then, that didn't have their tiffs!"

Valdo Clein was lighting a fresh cigarette with a jeweled lighter. Without looking at the detective, he flung over his shoulder:

"But not in the presence of the servants, my dear chap."

John Garth turned and scowled. His eyes came to rest on the jeweled lighter. Then he exclaimed:

"Now I got you! You're the Valdo Clein that the newspaper society writers call a 'prominent clubman,' aren't you? Son of old man Clein, the diamond importer who killed himself after they took him to a trimming in the market."

Without waiting for an answer, he whirled to face the servant again.

"You mean to stand there and tell me you searched this room from the time

you phoned police until just now, and never found that gun?"

"Y-yes sir. Absolutely, sir. I searched every inch, sir, and found nothing except—I mean to say, nothing at all, sir!"

Detective John Garth's little eyes suddenly flamed with eagerness.

"You're a liar! You know you're lying! Come clean, now!"

Valdo Clein froze, motionless, and forgot to snap his lighter shut. Beth Caruth was staring through the French windows, twisting the dinner ring about her finger.

The house-man gulped. "Well, I—I did find something, sir. Right there by the body, sir—no, over that direction about three feet—there! But I didn't want to get anybody in trouble, sir, so I didn't mention it—at first. Here it is, sir."

He held forth a small white slipper. A number 4-A slipper, with a broken strap. Severely plain, except for the inverted V of white cording carried up the center back of the heel.

"A—a woman!"

Detective Sergeant John Garth ceased to chew his gum for a moment, for his mouth was hanging open.

"Hot zig-gety!" cried Quinn of the *Trib* delightedly. "Cinderella stuff! What a yarn! Nothing to do but find who the shoe fits—and there you are! 'Police Hunt Cinderella Girl in McLean Murder!'"

## CHAPTER II

### SEARCH FOR CINDERELLA

VALDO CLEIN snapped his lighter shut, dropped it into his pocket, inhaled a deep draft of smoke, and smoothed his sleek hair.

Both he and Levi McLean had been grasping the automatic pistol at the instant it had been discharged, but it had been the pressure of Valdo's finger that had drawn the trigger. He had seen the weapon fall to the Oriental rug.

In that instant it had flashed upon him that this was a well-nigh perfect suicide "plant," if he could only escape undetected. And so he had left the pistol when he darted through the breakfast-room—for he too had heard the approaching footsteps of the house-man. When he had rushed back into the library, in the vanguard of the other guests, the servant already had found and concealed the slipper.



A sudden hush fell upon the room. For perhaps ten seconds Rick Benton stared down at his dead uncle. Presently he looked up, dumbly inquiring . . . at Garth, who said: "Somebody killed your uncle, son."

Valdo had been the most mystified person in the room when the house-man reported his inability to find the weapon. But the servant's revelation concerning the slipper explained everything—except the identity of the woman witness. And the reason for her refusal to denounce him!

Valdo Clein flicked at the tip of his cigarette and burnt his little finger. And

Beth Caruth twisted the dinner ring, and twisted and twisted.

She believed the man she had glimpsed fleeing from the library was Rick Benton, McLean's nephew. And Beth Caruth was in love with Rick. Under the circumstances, wild horses could not have dragged from her an admission she believed might have sent her lover to the chair.

She had fled with the gun because she believed she was protecting Rick. There had been no time to retrieve her slipper. Now she was beginning to realize how incriminating that slipper might prove. She ceased twisting the ring. She inhaled deeply. She forced a faint brave smile. A little thoroughbred, was Beth Caruth. Steeling herself for the ordeal she knew was inevitable. Determined to see it through for the man she loved!

"Murdo!" Detective Sergeant John Garth was calling to his partner. "Send all those house-party guests inside. We're going to find out who this here shoe fits!"

THE guests trooped inside. Almost every eye scrutinized the footwear of the feminine guests.

"No luck at all, John," remarked Quinn of the *Trib* to the detective. "All these chillun got shoes."

"One moment, Sergeant!"

At the excited outcry, all eyes turned. Valdo Clein was crouching in front of the wall-safe, twirling the combination. "I just happened to think—this safe might explain why—"

John Garth catapulted forward in a single bound. His big hand closed on the young man's arm. Violently he jerked it away from the safe.

"You damn' fool!" he cried out angrily. "Now you've gone and gummed things up for us—if there were any fingerprints on that safe!"

Valdo Clein looked bewildered.

"How inexpressibly stupid of me! Fingerprints! Of course! . . . Now there won't be any prints on the safe, except my own, will there?"

"You sap!" John Garth groaned. "Oh, you sap!"

Valdo Clein looked offended. "But I say, my dear chap! There's no occasion for such talk. I've admitted my error, and apologized."

John Garth shook his head, and spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"Was the safe locked, when you started to monkey with it?"

"Why, I really can't say, Sergeant. I started twirling the dial, and—"

As Valdo spoke, the detective sergeant seemed about to explode with anger. He swallowed hard, got himself under control, and interrupted:

"Who knows what's in that safe? . . . Does anybody know what's in that safe? . . . Speak up, somebody!"

The house-man coughed apologetically.

"Beg pardon, sir. I am sure no one here knows what is in the safe. The young master, Rick Benton, is the only person who knows."

"Oh, yeah? Well, where is Benton? At the broadcasting studio? Well, phone him and tell him to shake a—"

"Beg pardon, sir. I tried to phone him, from the telephone in the hall. But this newspaper reporter was using it, and he cursed me and wouldn't let me have it, sir. I don't know what can be delaying the young master, sir."

"Oh, no? Well, while we're waiting, we'll check on the alibis of some of these folks here. Was everybody dancing in the reception-hall?"

Quinn of the *Trib* nudged the detective and whispered:

"The slipper, John. Don't forget the slipper! And don't forget that the Final deadline is one-ten. Make it snappy, John!"

John Garth scowled. "You know where you can go to," he informed Quinn of the *Trib*.

"I believe everyone was dancing, sir," the house-man was saying. "They all came running down the corridor, after they heard the shot—that is, the gentlemen did. Except Mr. Clein, sir. If I remember rightly, he came in through the French windows, sir."

Detective Sergeant John Garth stabbed a blunt forefinger at Valdo Clein, who was examining his fingernails intently.

"You were dancing, were you?"

Without raising his head, Valdo Clein looked up under lifted brows.

"I was strolling on the loggia, smoking, my dear chap. Alone."

John Garth scowled. "On the what?"

The house-man coughed. "On the—er—porch, sir. Out there, sir. Outside the French windows."

BETH CARUTH, listening, started. Nervous fingers strayed toward her ring again. She had thought herself alone on the loggia. She thought now: "He must have seen me! If the worst comes to the worst, I can get him to swear I didn't go inside until after the shot was fired."

She knew no one had been near the French windows opening from the library. No one else, she thought, could have seen the slayer as he darted through the shadows into the breakfast-room.

Valdo Clein, smoothing his hair, was saying: "I was at the other end of the—of the porch, Sergeant. I thought the

shot was a car backfiring. By the time I strolled back past the French windows, the servant was at the library phone, calling the police."

"I see. And you didn't notice anybody taking a run-out from the library? A lady with only one shoe, maybe?"

"My dear chap, I am positive no one fled through the French windows."

"She couldn't have ducked out down the corridor, 'cause the servant would of seen her. So she must of lammed through that other door—to the breakfast-room, is it?"

Quinn of the *Trib* thrust his hand in front of the detective's eyes, so the officer could see his wrist-watch. He whispered:

"Lookit the time, John! Remember, the slipper angle is the feature of this yarn. I can't wait a second after one o'clock to flash the office on who knocked off Levi McLean."

John Garth scowled, and said under his breath:

"You're getting too fresh, kid. I got a notion to bust you one. Who d'you think you are?" Aloud, he announced:

"Now we're going to see who this slipper fits."

A commotion broke out outside. Some one was shouting:

"What's coming off here? Why are all these police cars here? What's happened? Let me inside!"

The words were vibrant with a dynamitic sort of energy—an electrical sort of a quality that made the voice, once heard, never forgotten.

"Rick Benton!" exclaimed Quinn of the *Trib*. "I'd know that voice in a million! Nobody else has that crackling delivery. No wonder they press-agent him as the most attractive personality on the air!"

Rick Benton vaulted the loggia balustrade and darted through the French windows. He was hatless, revealing crisp brown curly hair above bronzed face and gray eyes. On the lapel of his dinner-jacket he wore a gardenia.

Quinn of the *Trib* nudged his photographer.

"Pipe the gardenia, Ralph. It's his trademark. Wears it on all his clothes. Never without it."

"Don't I know? . . . I shot him at the beach, wearing a gardenia on his bathing suit. But the city desk barred my shot of him getting ready for bed, with a flower pinned on his p-j's. A lousy publicity-hound, he is!"



Beth Caruth kept her head turned away from the body of the murdered man as she answered Garth's questions! "Beth Caruth. . . Twenty. . . Single. . . Art student."

"No. If he seems like a mug, it's the way his press-agent dresses him, Ralph. On the level, he's a regular guy. . . . Hot ziggety! Look at the way he grabbed that little blonde queen with both hands!"

"Who wouldn't?" asked the photographer admiringly. "—If he had the chance?"

Rick Benton had seized both of Beth Caruth's hands in his.

"Beth!" he cried in the vibrant voice that had won him fame as a radio-announcer. "You're all right, aren't you, Beth?"

She responded with a convulsive pressure of her fingers.

"I know—everything!" she whispered, almost inaudibly. "But—I won't tell!"

Plainly, Rick was puzzled. He frowned. His lips parted to ask a ques-

tion. But Beth Caruth turned him with a little push. His eyes fell upon the body of Levi McLean. A sudden hush fell upon the room.

For perhaps ten seconds Rick Benton stared down at his dead uncle. Two or three times he blinked. Once he wet his lips with his tongue. Presently he looked up, dumbly inquiring. First he looked at Quinn of the *Trib*, and the reporter began tapping a cigarette on the back of his hand. He looked at the houseman, whose eyes wavered and fell. He looked at Detective Sergeant John Garth. Garth said:

"Somebody killed your uncle, son."

Rick Benton swallowed hard, and tried to speak.

"Who—" he began, and broke off and began again: "He—" and halted.

Then he clasped his hands behind him, and began teetering back and forth on heels and toes. The attitude, assumed so often by habit in front of the microphone, seemed to restore his confidence.

"I was detained at the studio. The other announcer was late in arriving. I had to fill in for him."

For a moment, silence. Then John Garth's nasal twang:

"That all you got to say?"

But before Rick Benton could answer, the detective added hurriedly:

"Nobody asked you for an alibi!"

"Alibi?" Rick Benton was balancing on his heels. "Alibi? . . . You—you think I killed my uncle?"

"If you didn't, who did?"

"How should I know?"

John Garth pounded palm with fist for emphasis.

"Who—was—the—woman?"

"The woman? . . . What woman?"

Detective Garth thrust forward the slipper.

"The woman that wore this slipper!"

Quinn of the *Trib* nudged his mug-snatcher. "Hot ziggety! The yarn sweetens, Ralph! . . . And how!"

### CHAPTER III

#### IF THE SHOE FITS—

RICK took the slipper, examined it, then returned it to the detective and shrugged.

"What are you trying to do? Bluff me?"

"I don't bluff, Mister!"

"If you think I murdered my uncle, all you have to do is to call up the studio."

John Garth was chewing his gum rapidly.

"Don't try to sidetrack me, son. I'm asking you about the woman!"

"What woman? . . . You hand me a slipper, and ask me who is the woman!"

"Yeah? Well, this slipper was found alongside the body of your uncle. It belongs to the woman that killed him!"

Rick Benton smiled, a bit derisively.

"Then you've changed your mind? You don't think I killed him?"

QUINN jiggled the detective's arm impatiently, and whispered:

"Listen, John. You can buzz this later. But we just got to have the woman angle before they put the Final to bed! We just got to!"

The officer growled:

"Oh, yeah? Well, who's running this—you or me? Any time I want your advice, I'll ask for it!"

He turned to the others, scowling fiercely.

"There's just one way to get this case cleaned up in a hurry, folks. And that is to find which lady's foot fits this slipper. I'm going to ask you all to step up and get a fitting. . . . Of course, if anybody refuses, that'll be a sign that—"

"I'm sure I'm quite ready to start the fitting, Sergeant," Beth announced, forcing a faint smile.

"Hot ziggety!" exclaimed Quinn of the *Trib* in a whisper. "Look at her, under that lamp! The beauty parlors turn 'em out nowadays so they all look alike. But this one—no beauty shop painted that masterpiece, Ralph! Just sweet, and natural, and wholesome, and—and—"

The photographer peered at his companion anxiously. "You drunk again?" he asked. Then he looked at Beth, and blinked. "No, you're not cockeyed. Anything but!"

Beth Caruth was leaning back, half-sitting on the library table, both hands resting upon its edge. She kept her head turned away from the body of the murdered man as she answered Garth's questions.

"Beth Caruth. . . . Twenty. . . . Single. . . . Art student."

The detective jerked his head at his partner, and jabbed a thumb in the direction of the body. The officer and the houseman lifted McLean's body, and awkwardly sidled with it to the broad leather divan. Then he turned back to Beth Caruth. "Yeah, I guess I read



your name in the society columns, lady. How come you happen to be here tonight?"

"As a house guest. Rick Benton was giving the party here in his uncle's home."

"Rick Benton? He wasn't even here—until just now."

Rick cleared his throat and cut in sharply:

"My duties at the studio usually keep me until eleven o'clock. By that time the dancing-party would hardly be under way."

Detective Sergeant John Garth scowled at the silent assemblage.

"Listen. I'm going to question everybody separate. I don't want one butting in while I'm talking to some one else, see? . . . Now, lady: Did you hear the shot fired?"

"Quite distinctly, Officer. One shot. No more."

"Where were you at the time?"

Already Valdo Clein had claimed he'd been on the loggia. Beth's hands left the edge of the table. Once more she began twisting her dinner ring about her finger. Her voice was scarcely audible as she replied:

"I was strolling. Outside."

"Who with? . . . Speak up!"

"Alone. Quite alone."

John Garth frowned and fingered his broken nose. "It don't sound reasonable, lady. Anybody with your looks—alone! But I don't see that it matters, any. You heard the shot, and ran into the library with the other guests?"

NOW Beth Caruth ceased twisting her ring. She had regained her composure, and was smiling faintly but bravely. Her eyes were resting on John Garth's forward-tilted derby.

"Quite the contrary. I didn't know what to do, so I did nothing. In a moment I heard some one shouting into the telephone for the police. I ran to my room."

Detective Sergeant John Garth became conscious of the girl's gaze, fixed on his hat. He reddened, and removed it, and placed it on the table. Thousands of persons had become nervous and flustered under John Garth's blunt questioning. But this was the first time he ever had been made to feel self-conscious by the one on the grill.

"We're wasting time," he said gruffly.

"After all, the only thing that really counts, is whether this slipper fits."

Beth Caruth drew a deep breath. She edged herself backward and upward, until she was seated on the edge of the table. She crossed her knees, reached down, and removed one strapless slipper from a silken beige foot. Her left hand was gripping the table-edge so fiercely that her knuckles were white.

Detective Sergeant John Garth wriggled his nose with his fingers, and his color deepened. Stiffly he dropped to one knee. In his right hand he was holding the slipper with the broken strap. He braced her silken heel in the cupped palm of his left hand.

HE found he had knelt a foot too far away. He dropped to both knees and edged forward a bit. The bald spot on the back of his head was crimson. He steered her toes into the slipper. He snorted, and announced:

"Say! This is the wrong foot!"

"Oh!" cried the girl softly, as if in mild surprise. "Truly, I hadn't noticed!"

The detective clumsily helped her remove her other slipper: His awkward fingers dropped the slipper with the broken strap. Somebody tittered. His ears were a fiery red. He snatched up the slipper and thrust it at her foot. It slipped into place—a perfect fit.

"It fits!" John Garth cried out exultantly.

Instantly there was a blinding flare of light.

"Hot ziggety!" exclaimed Quinn of the *Trib*. "What a swell leg shot, Ralph! 'Detective Fits Incriminating Slipper to Beautiful Suspect in Cinderella Murder Case!'"

John Garth sprang to his feet angrily and turned on the photographer.

"Enough is enough! You get out of here!"

Quinn of the *Trib* turned on his photographer, and pointed toward the French windows.

"You get out of here! . . . You've just got time to make the Final with that last shot!"

Rick Benton, furious, leaped toward the photographer.

"Look here! You can't put that kind of a picture of Beth Caruth in the paper!"

As Rick Benton rushed past him in pursuit of the photographer, Quinn of the *Trib* thrust forth a foot. The young radio-announcer went sprawling. The photographer ducked out through the windows and vaulted the balustrade with

his camera. Benton scrambled to his feet and started after him. John Garth's partner gripped him by the sleeve and spun him round.

"Sorry, Mister. Nobody leaves this house. Orders!"

Detective Sergeant John Garth squinted at Beth Caruth behind leveled forefinger.

"You killed Levi McLean!"

NOW that the actual test had come, Beth Caruth was unshaken. What she was doing, she was doing, she believed, to shield the man she loved.

"What makes you think so?" she parried soberly.

"Why did you shoot him? . . . Answer me!"

Rick Benton, boiling with rage, flung himself between the officer and the girl. His fists were doubled.

"Look here!" he shouted in John Garth's face. "You can't accuse Beth Caruth of—murder!"

John Garth placed the palm of his hand on the radio-announcer's white shirt-front and pushed him backward.

"You got a bad habit of talking out of turn, son!" he growled, and turned to the girl again. "Tell me why you killed McLean, lady!"

Beth pursed her lips. There was the hint of a twinkle in her eye, as if she were enjoying matching wits with the detective.

"Am I under arrest, Officer? Are you formally charging me with murder?"

John Garth was growing angry.

"Listen here, lady. I'm asking you questions—you're answering them. See?"

"Oh! I see."

Garth snorted with exasperation.

"Do you deny you killed Levi McLean?"

Rick Benton was white around the lips as he pushed forward again.

"You can't talk to Beth that way! I won't stand for it! I tell you—"

"Murdo!" John Garth jerked his head in the direction of his partner. "Take this lad and see that he speaks only when he's spoken to. If you have to, take him in the next room and bracelet him! . . . Lady, where did you stash the gat?"

Beth said: "I'm sorry. I don't understand."

"I said, where did you hide the pistol? The gun you used to kill him with?"

"The gun? What makes you think I know anything about the gun?"

John Garth ground his teeth with exasperation. Rick Benton started forward, and his lips parted as if he were about to interrupt again. The big hand of Garth's partner closed over his mouth. He sputtered a moment, and subsided.

The detective frowned, and stared at Beth, and manipulated his broken nose with his thumb and forefinger, and stared at Rick Benton.

"Look here," he asked the girl. "You and him are sweeties, aren't you?"

Beth Caruth shrugged.

"And what if we are?"

"Oh, nothing much. Except that it supplies the one missing link in the case against you! One last question—just as a matter of form, 'cause I know what your answer's going to be. Have you got any witnesses that can swear you were outside when McLean was murdered?"

Beth smiled indulgently. "Don't you remember? I told you I was alone. Quite alone."

John Garth was growing angry. "For the last time, lady—will you come clean and tell us just why you killed that man?" He pointed dramatically to the body on the couch.

"Unless my newspaper reading is at fault, Sergeant, the customary reply to that question is: 'See my lawyer.' Isn't it?"

Quinn of the *Trib* was edging toward the door, heading for the hall telephone.

"I hate to think of such a swell-looking doll frying in the hot seat," he told himself. "But she's in a tough spot. John's building a swell case against her. I better flash the office that when that slipper fitted, it meant death for Cinderella!"

## CHAPTER IV

### DEATH FOR CINDERELLA?

BETH CARUTH was "stalling" in the belief she was protecting Rick Benton, who, she was convinced, had slain his uncle. Was she mad? No. She loved Rick.

"Get ready to go," John Garth told her gruffly. "The fit of that slipper will send you to the chair!"

She slipped to the floor and slid her feet into the strapless slippers. The detective made no move to assist her.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" she asked him soberly.

"I wish you'd quit asking me ques-



The beam revealed the closet door, standing open. John Garth was standing with drawn revolver, waiting to "cover" his expected prisoner. But there was no prisoner.

tions!" he exploded irritably. "No, I haven't forgotten anything! . . . Well, what is it you think I've forgotten?"

"To see if the slipper fits anyone else."

He stared at her, frowning. "A good idea, at that. When we find that it doesn't, that'll cinch the case, and nobody can say we stopped before we'd applied the test to everybody. . . . Ladies!

This way. One at a time, please. Merely as a matter of formality."

A four-A shoe is small, but not extraordinarily small. To John Garth's bewilderment, he found that the slipper fitted two others of the feminine guests.

"Now," Beth Caruth remarked pleasantly, "I shall have some congenial companions in my cell, Sergeant!"

He glared at her suspiciously. "You trying to give me the needles, lady?" He fingered his pliant nose while he pondered. "Whoever lost that slipper when McLean was murdered, must have beat it to her room right away and changed—if it was anybody in this house. What's the answer? We got three lady guests that the slipper fits. We'll search their rooms. In one of them we're going to find the mate to this here slipper."

CLEIN had pursued much the same course of reasoning, some minutes since. The discovery of the slipper near McLean's body had proven a tremendous shock to him, for as he saw it, it meant the owner of the slipper, whoever she was, had witnessed the murder.

But, he asked himself, why had she failed to denounce him as the slayer? Why was she holding her tongue?

Then John Garth had fitted the slipper to Beth Caruth's foot, and Valdo Clein told himself that here was the woman who had witnessed the shooting. Vanity was one of Valdo Clein's outstanding traits, which doubtless is the reason he leaped at the only conclusion that seemed at all reasonable—that Beth was trying to shield him because she loved him! They had known each other for several years, but he had never dreamed she cherished any particular affection for him.

"She fled to her room and changed slippers," he reasoned. "Sooner or later that detective is going to wake up to the fact, and search her room for its mate. If he does, he'll find the other slipper, and that will clinch the case against her. Sooner than see herself sent to the chair, she'll forget her affection for me. She'll crack, and tell the truth.

"That's what I must prevent, at any cost! I've got to get the mate to that slipper!"

While Detective Sergeant John Garth was shooting questions at Beth, Valdo Clein edged from the room. He knew the women house-guests were quartered in the west wing, two to a room. But he was unaware which room Beth Caruth occupied.

All the guests and servants were gathered at the library. The rest of the house was deserted. Valdo Clein began a systematic search of the rooms in the women's wing. Except in one room where a lamp was burning, his only light was that of his cigarette-lighter. On

his knees, he would examine every pair of slippers in each clothes closet, searching for the severely plain white slipper with an inverted V of white cording on the heel.

And at length he found it. With an exclamation of satisfaction, he thrust it into the pocket of his dinner-jacket and doused the flame of his cigarette-lighter. As he stepped from the doorway of the closet, into Beth Caruth's darkened room, he heard the sound of voices.

The room had but one door. To pass through it, would be to emerge in the lighted corridor in full view of the approaching searchers—and the windows opened fifteen feet above stone flagging.

"Perhaps they'll search another room first!" was the thought that flashed through Valdo Clein's mind. He snatched the key from the closet door, stepped back into the closet, drew the door shut, softly inserted the key from the inside, and turned it.

"She says this is her room," Valdo Clein could hear the detective saying. "Well, 'twon't take more'n two shakes of a nightstick to tell whether the mate to that slipper is here!"

Valdo Clein heard the click of a light switch as John Garth led the searching-party into the room. A crack of light appeared under the closet door.

GARTH was followed by his partner and by all the guests and servants. Beth Caruth's composure gradually was dissolving. When she had changed slippers, it had not occurred to her that her room might be searched for the one she had lost. Now that discovery of the slipper seemed inevitable, confession was trembling on her lips.

A swift glance at Rick Benton changed her mind. He was pallid—seemed to be laboring under a tremendous mental strain. She did not dream that it was anxiety for her that was responsible for his strained appearance. She assumed he was in desperate fear of detection. She bit her lip to keep back her intended confession.

Detective Sergeant John Garth strode straight to the closet door and turned the knob.

"Why, it's locked!" he exclaimed. He whirled to face Beth Caruth. "Only one person could have locked it! Lady, come through with that key!"

Beth Caruth was more astounded than any other person in the room, to find the closet door locked.

"It was not locked when I left it!" she retorted with spirit. And she was telling the truth.

John Garth snorted. "This shows we're on the right track—that you're the owner of that slipper! You wouldn't lock that closet door unless you had something to hide! Give us the key before we smash the door!"

Beth shrugged helplessly. "Can't you understand? I haven't the key!"

"C'mon, Murdo." John Garth jerked his head at his partner. "Let's kick the panels out of this door!"

ALL this was plainly audible to Valdo Clein, crouching in the closet, white of face and desperate. His cigarette lighter flashed alight. He glanced about despairingly. Sometimes closets had windows. Sometimes a hatchway in the ceiling led to an attic above.

There was no window, no hatchway. Nothing but Beth Caruth's filmy garments, and alongside the door, a metal switch- and fuse-cabinet.

Valdo Clein opened the metal door of the cabinet. Then he extinguished his lighter and dropped it into his pocket. With his left hand he gripped the key, still in the lock. With his right he found the handle of the electric switch inside the cabinet. He knew such a switch must control a number of lights—probably all the lights on the floor.

He jerked the switch and turned the key at the same instant. As he flung open the door and rushed out into the room, suddenly plunged into pitch darkness, pandemonium broke loose.

He collided with John Garth. The detective stumbled, tripped and bumped into the dressing-table. It overturned and crashed to the floor with the clatter of breaking glass.

Women were screaming. John Garth was cursing. Valdo Clein plunged straight for the door to the corridor. He smashed into a man, struck at him, and darted on.

He sideswiped a shrieking woman. With a sweep of his arm he hurled her, screaming with terror, into the milling group of guests and servants. The next instant he was through the door and in the corridor.

But those within the pitch blackness of the room were unaware of his escape.

"Grab him, somebody!" John Garth bellowed as he struggled to his feet amidst the wreckage of the dressing-table. "Shut the door into the hall,

so he can't get out! . . . Don't shoot, Murdo—not in this crowded room!"

Somebody slammed the door. Two of the male guests were struggling with each other, each believing he had caught a criminal. A male voice was demanding that some one turn on a light. Another voice cursed the first voice, and announced the wires had been cut, because the boudoir lamp wouldn't turn on.

The beam of an electric torch cut through the blackness. It was in the hand of John Garth's partner.

"Drop your gun and put up your hands, whoever you are!" he demanded. "The door's closed, and you can't get away!"

The beam swept across the wall, and revealed the closet door, standing open.

"I know what happened!" exclaimed Rick Benton, who had been trying to find Beth Caruth. "Somebody cut the switch in the closet!"

He darted inside the closet and threw the switch. Instantly the lights flashed on. John Garth was standing with drawn revolver, waiting to "cover" his expected prisoner.

BUT there was no prisoner. John Garth looked about sheepishly. The dressing-table was smashed. The room reeked with the heavy odor of perfume from a shattered bottle. The corridor door was closed.

"What happened?" some one gasped.

"Somebody had locked himself in the closet!" John Garth panted. "He cut the light switch and ducked out!"

"I've a gun in my room!" Rick Benton spoke up excitedly. "Let me out! I'll get him! We can stop him before he gets away!"

"Don't get excited," advised John Garth. "He can't get away. By this time there are twenty uniformed officers surrounding this house. If he tries to break through the cordon, they got orders to shoot—to kill!"

A dozen excited questions were fired at the detective simultaneously.

"Who was in the closet?"

"Was it the murderer?"

"Was there a man involved in the murder?"

"Why was he hiding in the closet?"

Detective Sergeant John Garth held up a hand commanding silence.

"Shut up!" he roared. "Everybody shut up! You're enough to drive a body nuts! . . . Let me think a second!"

"But whoever it was, is escaping!"



The discovery of the slipper near McLean's body meant to Valdo Clein that the owner of the slipper, whoever she was, had witnessed the murder. Why had she failed to denounce him as the slayer?

Detective Sergeant John Garth was deep in thought.

"I got a hunch," he announced slowly. "I got a hunch I know who was hiding in that closet."

From his pocket he drew the slipper with the broken strap, and stepped into the closet. A moment later he reappeared, scowling. Beth Caruth was holding her breath in suspense.

"Just as I expected," John Garth announced. "Whoever it was, stole the slipper!"

"Man," scoffed Rick Benton, "you don't even know the slipper was there!"

Beth Caruth expelled her pent-up breath suddenly, in relief and amazement. If the slipper was gone, she was safe—for the moment!

"Murdo," said Garth, "keep everybody in this room, while I go out and get the bird that was in that closet!"

## CHAPTER V

### FIFTY MILLION WITNESSES CAN'T BE WRONG

JOHN GARTH stepped into the corridor and closed the door behind him.

The only person visible was Quinn of the *Trib*. He had been phoning in the latest flash, at the telephone in the reception-hall on the first floor, when the sudden uproar upstairs had brought him on the run.

"What's the matter, John?" he demanded, panting.

John Garth gripped him by the shoulder and glared at him.

"You been prowling the dump to snatch mugs, you louse!"

Quinn of the *Trib* drew himself up haughtily.

"Do you mean to insinuate that a *Tribune* reporter would steal photographs?"

"You snatched her mug off the dresser, and when you heard us coming, you hid in the closet!"

"Listen, John: Why should I steal her picture when our photographer already mugged her—and a swell leg shot, at that? . . . Besides, house-guests don't bring their own photos to ornament their rooms at a week-end party. . . . Was some one hiding in the closet?"

"Don't stall, kid. I know reporters. I know nobody else would have any reason to hide in the closet. Now, it doesn't make any matter with me if you cop her picture off the lady's dresser. But when you glom actual evidence, that's something else again. You kick through with that slipper you grabbed, and we'll call it square!"

Quinn sniffed suspiciously.

"A perfume jag! That explains it!"

"Don't get funny! Just because you want a picture of the slipper to put in your paper is no reason to obstruct justice. You give me that slipper, or else—"

"Or else?"

"Oh, c'mon, then! I don't need the slipper! I know it was in her closet!"

"But tell me what happened, John? What was all the commotion about? What—"

Detective Sergeant John Garth flung open the door to Beth Caruth's room. Immediately he sensed a tense silence.

"What's the matter, Murdo?" he demanded of his partner.

"Look what fell outa the dresser when you—when it got knocked over," said the other officer.

The drawer had been jarred open, and the contents tumbled out. In the midst of a heap of cosmetic-jars, hairpins, costume jewelry, manicure instruments and clothes-brushes, the whole liberally covered with face-powder from a spilled receptacle, lay an automatic pistol.

"I wouldn't let anybody touch it till you came back," Garth's partner explained. "The face-powder oughta bring out the fingerprints on it swell."



John Garth beamed as he picked the weapon up by hooking a single finger through the trigger guard. He blew the excess powder from the gun.

"Swell!" he admitted. "A woman's prints, too, or I'm a liar!"

He sniffed at the muzzle.

"Been fired pretty recent, too—within the last hour. . . . Well, I guess we won't have to bother about the slipper now. We couldn't ask any better evidence than this!"

He turned to Beth Caruth.

"Well, lady—you ready to come clean, now?"

She ceased fingering her ring.

"What can you want me to say?" she asked, with poise unshaken. "You just said you couldn't want any better evidence!"

"Can you explain how the pistol with which Levi McLean was killed happens to be found in your room, ma'am?"

"Oh! Is it the same pistol?"

"You know it's the same!"

He turned and eyed the group.

"Anybody here able to identify this gun?"

The house-man coughed. "Beg pardon, sir. It is the master's own pistol, sir—Mr. McLean's. He always kept it in the drawer in the library table, sir."

"Yeah? Good! . . . Where's McLean's nephew? Benton, is this your uncle's gun?"

The young radio-announcer reached for the weapon. It was his intention to smear away the fingerprints while handling it—the prints he correctly assumed were Beth's.

"Oh—oh!" cried John Garth warningly, jerking the gun out of reach. "Just take a look at it without touching, Benton, and tell me if it's the one that belonged to your uncle."

"I can't. Not without examining it."

"No? . . . If you took hold of this gun, you'd mess up her fingerprints on it, wouldn't you?"

Rick stood glaring at the officer, his fists clenched. John Garth went on:

"Your uncle was against your marrying this lady, wasn't he? And she knew it, didn't she?"

"On the contrary, Officer, he was quite fond of her. He never attempted to dictate to me in such matters."

"No? Well, then it was the first time in his life he didn't try to run things to suit himself! The newspapers called him a political dictator, and I guess they were right. He was boss of his party. He decided who could run for office, from precinct committeeman up to Senator Richman himself! *Everybody knows that!*"

"I fail to see what bearing his differences with Senator Richman have on this case."

"Differences? I thought they were as close as two—as two—as two friends. But it *don't* have any bearing on why your lady friend killed your uncle. . . . You're his only heir, aren't you?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only, with him dead and you inheriting his money, you'd be a pretty swell catch for whoever married you!"

A SHARP little cry burst from the lips of Beth Caruth.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Beth. He's completely muddled—shooting in the dark in the hope a chance shot may go home!" Rick urged in a tight voice.

"Oh, yeah?" John Garth snorted. "Well, young fellow, just for that crack, how'd you like to feel the heat yourself? I'm not so sure both of you weren't in on this job! . . . Murdo, hop down to the phone and call the broadcasting station and check up this lad's alibi."

His partner replied: "I already called 'em. They said there were fifty or sixty people at the studio saw Benton make the midnight announcement, just before he started home."



Rick smiled. John Garth fingered his nose thoughtfully, and said:

"We got our flash two, three minutes after midnight. The house-man phoned Headquarters less'n a minute after he heard the shot. That means Levi McLean was murdered at midnight. Almost exactly midnight. Hm-m-m."

John Garth's partner spoke up again: "They said Benton was announcing a program on a national hook-up. They said fifty million people, all over the United States, were listening in. They said his voice is so different that nobody can imitate it. They said any listener could testify it was him announcing."

QUINN of the *Trib* snapped his fingers delightedly.

"Hot ziggety! What a line! 'Fifty Million Witnesses Furnish Alibi for Murder Suspect!'"

One of the women house-guests put in eagerly:

"Indeed, we all heard him, right here at the house! We were dancing in the reception-hall, to the radio music. We all heard him make the announcement—didn't we?"

Quinn of the *Trib*, standing beside the detective, whispered from the side of his mouth:

"They got you on the run, John. Fifty million witnesses can't be wrong!"

John Garth scowled. He hated to admit he was licked.

"You say you were delayed at the broadcasting studio because the announcer was late, who was to relieve you. Who is he? Why was he late?"

Rick Benton was smiling confidently.

"Graham Vance is his name—you've all heard him on the air. He's due to relieve me at eleven o'clock, but tonight he was delayed. Car trouble, he said. He arrived just as I was announcing, at midnight. I had asked him to drop in here at the house earlier in the evening for a dance, if he cared to."

"Vance was here," put in one of the guests. "He left in plenty of time to reach the studio by eleven."

John Garth nodded, scowling. Valdo Clein had edged into the room some minutes since, while attention had been concentrated on Rick Benton. By asking Garth's partner for a match, he definitely but unobtrusively had established the fact of his presence, in case of questioning later.

Garth asked Rick: "Vance in the habit of being late, like that?"

"He never was late before."

"Just happened to be late tonight, of all nights, eh? Just happened to have car-trouble at just the time it would provide you with an alibi! Convenient sort of a pal to have!"

"What," snapped Rick Benton, "are you driving at?"

"Getting worried?" prodded John Garth. "Oh, I was just working out a little theory of my own. Got to wondering, son, why you'd be so all-fired anxious to build yourself an alibi tonight—an alibi so ironclad strong that nothing could break it—an alibi by fifty million witnesses!"

"I don't get you."

"You wouldn't admit it, if you did get me. But I don't mind telling you my theory—which isn't a theory any longer, barring one or two little matters that are easily checked up."

"You and your sweetie, here, wanted McLean out of the way, so you could get married and have all his money. The two of you framed up to kill him. You realized that, because you're his heir, you'd be the first to be suspected. So you arranged this airtight alibi, and let the girl do the dirty work. Now, are you going to let her take the fall—alone? A sweet little thing like her, shielding you because you're too—"

Rick was smiling easily as he interrupted. "Marvelous theory, Sergeant. But why should I go to the trouble to have Graham Vance's car break down just when it did? If I'd been as smart as you think, I'd have arranged the killing an hour or so earlier, during my regular time on duty, wouldn't I?"

John Garth turned to his partner.

"Murdo, hop to the phone and check up on this car trouble of the other announcer's. Find out what it was, and how it happened at such a convenient time. There's something mighty funny about it!"

## CHAPTER VI

### A SHOT IN THE DARK

BETH CARUTH had been laboring under a terrific nervous tension. So long as she had thought she was protecting the man she loved, she had been able to bear up admirably. Now she felt as if she were about to collapse. She felt the need of some one to help her, some one to tell her what to do.

Quinn whispered to the detective:

"How about the man in the closet, John? If Benton proved he was at the broadcasting studio, your theory doesn't account for the gent who stole the slipper."

John Garth frowned and replied: "Don't get me all mixed up. I know it was you hiding in the closet!"

"You blown your top, or something, John? I tell you, I wasn't near the closet!"

"Don't try to kid me, son. I got important work to do."

Quinn shrugged. "Okay. Not my funeral. . . . Here, there's a lady wants to speak to you, Sarge. Excuse me, Miss Caruth."

HE stepped back—but not so far back he couldn't catch what the girl was saying. From the corner of his eye he watched her.

"Sergeant! I—I wonder if you—if you'd let me talk to Rick Benton. Alone. For—just a moment. . . . Please!"

Valdo Clein edged close to Quinn and extended his cigarette-case.

"Smoke? . . . These damn' lighters—never work."

The reporter helped himself to a cigarette and handed Clein a folder of paper matches. Both could hear what passed between John Garth and Beth Caruth.

"So you want to talk to Rick Benton, do you, lady? Think it's about time to come clean, and confess everything?"

She spoke softly, but Valdo Clein and Quinn could hear her.

"I am quite certain, Sergeant, that I shall have something—something very important to tell you, after I—talk with Rick."

"You haven't been telling me the truth, have you, lady?"

"N-not the whole truth. May I talk with Rick? . . . Please!"

Garth regarded her appraisingly.

"Maybe him and you are framing up to make your stories jibe, lady. Maybe I oughtn't to let you. But I'm going to take a chance, because I think you're ready to crack. Okay, you and him go down to the library and talk it over, while the rest of us stay in the reception-hall. When you're ready to talk, call me."

"Excuse me," said Quinn of the *Trib*, glancing at his wrist-watch. "I got to phone."

"I'm going downstairs too," said Valdo Clein. For the first time his hand

was shaking as he flicked the ash from his cigarette. At last he had guessed that Beth Caruth believed Rick Benton was the man she had seen in the library at the time of the killing—and that she had been striving to shield Rick.

"Just as soon as she talks it over with him, she's going to tell everything!" he said to himself as he parted with the reporter at the foot of the stairs. His heart was beating wildly with fear of exposure, but aside from the slight trembling of his hand, he gave no outward evidence of his trepidation. "I've got to stop her before she talks—even to Rick!" he decided. "If I don't, it means the chair for me!"

He strolled down the corridor toward the kitchen. The moment the door had swung shut behind him, he dashed for the servants' stairway. He bounded up the stairs and sped through the second-floor corridor in the wing where Rick and the male guests were quartered.

He turned into Rick's room. He dared not turn on the lights. He flicked his cigarette-lighter alight, and by its flickering glow darted toward the chest of drawers. With feverish haste he began examining the contents of the drawers.

Until he reached the bottom drawer, his search was fruitless. Then a stifled exclamation of satisfaction burst from his lips.

He carefully covered the palm of his right hand with one of Rick Benton's kerchiefs. Then he reached into the drawer, and keeping the kerchief over his hand like a glove, lifted an automatic pistol from the drawer. Without releasing his grip upon it, he thrust hand and pistol into the pocket of his dinner jacket and hastily he closed the drawers.

He darted to the door. But when he emerged into the corridor, he was strolling at a leisurely pace.

IT required a tremendous effort of will to keep from breaking into a run, for he realized that the success of his plan hinged upon the speed with which he carried it out. And yet he knew it would be fatal to his plan, if anyone should see him running.

He deliberately showed himself in the reception-hall, where the officers, guests and servants were gathered, in tense, whispering groups. Unobtrusively he strolled down the corridor to the breakfast-room. Thence he made his way to the loggia, and to the French windows opening from the library.



"It's the only way to keep her from sending me to the chair!" Clein said to himself, and pulled the trigger. He flung the weapon into the library, turned, and sped through the blackness of the loggia.

Rick Benton and Beth Caruth were seated on the leather divan, from which Levi McLean's body had been removed shortly before. Valdo Clein's heart was pounding wildly as he raised the pistol and leveled the weapon at the girl's head.

"It's the only way to keep her from sending me to the chair!" he said to himself, and pulled the trigger. A split instant later he flung the weapon into the

library. He turned, and sped through the inky blackness of the loggia, close to the wall. . . .

Detective Sergeant Garth, in the reception-hall, was allaying the fears of one of the guests.

"No, of course they won't escape. This house is surrounded. Nobody can escape. If they tried to sneak away, my flatties would turn 'em back. If they

tried to make a break, the boys would shoot 'em—if they had to. There's not a chance that— *What's that?*"

The sound of the pistol-shot cut him off abruptly. For an instant a startled hush settled upon the group in the reception-hall. Then a woman moaned, a woman shrieked, a woman swore; John Garth reached for his gun, a man broke for the door, tripped and fell, and the house-man called hoarsely: "*In the library!*"

**D**ETECTIVE GARTH led the rush for the library. At the door he collided violently with Beth Caruth, who was running from the room.

"Somebody—tried to shoot us!" she gasped. She clung to him an instant to keep from being knocked to the floor.

He jerked her erect. Gun in hand, he rushed into the room, his partner and the guests and servants at his heels. None noticed Valdo Clein as he melted into the throng, smoothing his sleek hair with both hands.

The detective found Rick Benton, an automatic pistol in his fingers, plunging toward the French windows. He yelled:

"Drop that gun, or I'll plug you!" Rick dropped the gun and spun about. He wiped his cheek with his hand, and then looked at his fingers vacantly. They were red with blood.

"You think I tried to kill her—or to shoot myself! But I tell you I didn't! Somebody—somebody standing just outside these windows—shot at us!"

John Garth picked up the fallen weapon—by the trigger-guard.

"Murdo! See if anybody tried to break through the boys outside! I don't think anybody did, but— Ask 'em if any of 'em seen anybody outside this window. Step on it!"

He spun about to face Rick Benton, meanwhile keeping him covered. Rick was sopping the blood from his cheek with his kerchief.

"Hurry up, young fellow! Spill it. What happened?"

"We were sitting on the divan, here. Beth had just started—"

"I'd just started to tell him what really happened when his uncle was shot, when—" Beth was back in the room now. Rick interrupted her.

"When—*bam!*" He clapped his hands together violently. "Just like that, the shot came. I didn't feel the bullet groove my cheek—didn't even know I'd been

hit! I pushed Beth toward the door and told her to get out. And I ran to the window to see if I could—"

"It's the truth, Sergeant!" Beth put in eagerly. "That's exactly how it happened!"

John Garth paused, fingering his broken nose thoughtfully. His glance swept past Rick and Beth, and darted from one person in the crowd to another.

"Don't look at me!" Quinn of the *Trib* protested resentfully. "I didn't do it!"

Garth's gaze remained fixed on Quinn, who said nervously: "I might borrow a photograph without permission, John; but honest, I wouldn't go so far as to try to kill a woman, just to sweeten up a yarn!"

The detective held up the confiscated pistol before Rick Benton's eyes. "Your gun?"

Rick Benton looked puzzled. "Yes, it's my gun; but I don't know how it—"

Beth Caruth gripped his arm and emitted a tiny shriek. "Look!" she cried, pointing at the divan.

On the leather seat lay a tiny blonde curl. "The bullet must have clipped it from my head!" she cried. "Another inch, and it would have— Oh, Rick! I—I feel sort of—dizzy!"

John Garth asked ironically: "Is radio-announcing so hazardous that you have to carry a gun, Benton?"

**RICK BENTON** stared at the weapon, and blinked.

"He threw it into the room—whoever it was that shot at us. But it's my pistol, all right. I never carry it, though I have a permit. I always keep it in a drawer in my room."

"Yeah? S'posing your story's true, and there *was* some one outside the window? Why should he toss you a gun after trying to kill you?"

"Why—why, this is the way I reason it out, Sergeant: He wanted to kill one of us. He tossed the gun inside, so the police would think the other one had done it. The police sometimes—er—make such mistakes, you know."

"Huh! Why should anybody want to kill either of you? Tell me that!"

"I can't see why anybody should want to kill me, Sergeant. But as for Beth—maybe somebody wanted to kill her to keep her from talking. She was just about to tell me—"

"Tell you—what?"

"I don't know. She hardly had time to get started talking, before that pistol banged."

"Lady, are you ready to tell us the truth, now?"

Beth Caruth looked about helplessly. She gazed appealingly at Rick.

"I—I don't know what to do!" she whispered, her assurance almost gone.

Quinn of the *Trib* shook his head. "Death for Cinderella, either way you take it," he muttered to himself. "The law, in the person of John Garth, trying to send her to the chair. And somebody else trying to blow her brains out before she can tell the whole truth. It makes a swell yarn, but—hot ziggety! It's tough on Cinderella! What a wonderful kid, to be frying in the hot seat! Ugh!"

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SLIPPER FITS

JOHN GARTH'S partner pushed through the doorway.

"I didn't have time to tell you that I'd phoned the studio again and checked on the announcer who was late, John."

"Okay, Murdo. What did he say?"

"He was sore as a boiled owl. And I can't say that I blame him."

"Well, tell us about it. What happened?"

"He said his car stalled, just before he reached the main highway, after leaving here. He tried to fix it himself, but he couldn't find anything wrong. There was no traffic on the side road. Finally he walked to the main highway and flagged a car and begged a ride to where he could get a taxi. After he reached the studio he phoned a garage to tow his car in, and repair it."

"Yeah. . . . Well, what about it?"

"Nothing, only he was sore at the cost of towing and the labor of two expert mechanics, and everything. It's going to cost him about fifteen bucks. And all they did was to take out a wad of chewing-gum!"

"Diagram it, Murdo. I don't get you."

"Somebody had stuck a wad of chewing-gum on the little air-hole in the cap on his gasoline tank. The car would run okay for a coupla miles, till a vacuum was built up in the gas tank. Then the gas wouldn't feed into the carburetor any more, and the car would stop. That's all that was the matter with Graham Vance's car—but it cost him fifteen dollars to find it out. . . . And is he sore!"

John Garth nodded thoughtfully.

"So his car didn't just break down, accidental! Somebody had deliberately framed his car trouble. Why? So's to detain Rick Benton at the broadcasting studio; that's why! And there's only one reason anybody'd want to detain him there."

"Somebody knew that Levi McLean was going to be murdered! That somebody wanted to be certain Rick Benton would have an alibi! And it was somebody here in this house, who put the gum on the cap before Vance left here! . . . Lady, do you chew gum?"

Beth Caruth gasped, and twisted her ring.

"Why—when I'm playing golf, sometimes—yes. But of course, not at a party—like this!"

Quinn of the *Trib* winked broadly at the Sergeant. He whispered from behind a cupped hand:

"Ps-st! Ask her what Benton told her about the safe, John!"

John Garth looked puzzled.

"Lady, what did Benton tell you about the safe?"

Now it was Beth Caruth who looked puzzled.

"How do you know— Oh, all right! I asked him if there was something valuable in the safe, and he said nothing except some political papers. . . . But how—how do you know he told me anything about the safe?"

Quinn was looking out over the heads of the guests with a bored expression. But from the side of his mouth he whispered again:

"Ps-st! Ask her what she told him about the gardenia, John!"

Garth choked suddenly.

"Excuse me for a minute, folks, while I go out in the hall." He thumbed Quinn of the *Trib* in the ribs. "Come along with me. I want to talk to you!"

WHEN they were in the corridor, he gripped the reporter by both arms, and stared him in the eye.

"Damn you, you tell me how you know all this stuff about the safe and the gardenia! You're holding out on me—after all I done for you! I got a notion to bust you one!"

"The *Trib* Sees All—Knows All—"

John Garth squeezed with his hands. Quinn winced.

"Ouch! I'll tell you, John! I was behind the divan!"

"You—huh?"



"I was behind the divan. When you told 'em to talk it over in the library, I pretended I was going to phone, but instead I slipped into the library to get first shot at whatever they spilled. They'd just started to talk when—*wham!* Somebody just missed winging a reporter."

John Garth shook the *Trib* man.

"Then they're telling the truth, huh? Somebody really shot at 'em? Who was it?"

"Ixnay, John! I'm telling you, I was behind the divan. I couldn't see who it was. S'help me!"

"And what's this stuff about a gardenia?"

"Ask her, and find out. All I know is, she'd just started to tell him something about a gardenia, when the shot was fired. Ask her, John—so I can find out."

"C'mon back into the library. Now we're beginning to get somewhere!"

"Cinderella's on the up and up, John. She didn't do it!"

THEY stepped into the library again. John Garth jabbed a forefinger at Rick Benton.

"You know the combination to that wall safe? . . . Okay. Open her up. . . . Anything missing?"

Rick Benton shrugged as the door of the safe swung open.

"I don't know. Don't think so. I know my uncle never made it a practice to keep valuables here—only important papers. Of course, I don't know what he might have put in the safe recently."

"Did he keep a copy of his will in the safe?"

"I think not. Here—take a look at these documents, and see for yourself."

John Garth shuffled through the papers. Quinn of the *Trib*, peering over his shoulder, exclaimed "Oh-oh!" when he reached a packet of scented, tinted notes, tied with a pink ribbon.

"I'll help you look 'em over," he offered.

"Oh, yeah?" Garth sniffed, drew forth one of the notes and, muttering, began to read aloud:

"Darling Mine: How I have missed you since you've been away! My dearest, dearest Wally—my own, my very own—my sweet, my—"

The officer broke off and curled his lip and said. "Phooey! Mush stuff!"

Quinn of the *Trib* cried, "Hot ziggety!" and reached out a hand for the packet.

"Don't burn your fingers," advised Garth. "You don't get this stuff, see? It's personal—maybe love-letters sent to McLean by his wife, before they were married."

Quinn of the *Trib* said: "I thought McLean's name was Levi—not Wally."

As John Garth scrutinized the address, written in an unmistakably feminine hand on one of the scented envelopes, Quinn cried:

"Hot ziggety! Love notes sent to United States Senator Wallington Mc-Alexander Richman! Give 'em to me, John! I'll sell you my immortal soul for—"

John Garth interrupted with a sniff. "Soul? . . . But I can't figure out what they were doing in McLean's safe!"

"I got it, John! Levi McLean, the political czar, made Richman Senator, but Richman got proud and wouldn't stand hitched—thought he was bigger than his boss. Intimations that Richman wouldn't be a candidate to succeed himself led some of the political writers to think McLean had something on the Senator!"

John Garth nodded sagely.

"Sure. Just what it was on the tip of my tongue to say. But—"

"McLean did have something on the Senator—these letters! And there's your motive for the murder, John!"

"Just what I was going to say! Only, I don't see how Senator—"

"He didn't do it himself, John. What would you have done, if you'd been in his place, with some one threatening to ruin you politically by giving these scandal notes to the papers?"

"I wouldn't have murdered him. Anybody'd be crazy to—"

"Richman didn't murder him—didn't hire some one else to murder him, either! Don't you see? He hired somebody to steal the incriminating notes from McLean's safe. McLean caught the thief in the act. There was a struggle, and McLean was murdered!"

EXACTLY what I was saying when you interrupted me!" Garth lowered his voice to a whisper. "We'll get the murderer, okay. But with McLean dead, and Richman's money behind him, and all his drag, and everything, he'll beat the rap, son! Another of those political acquittals that take the heart out of a police officer who's done his duty!"

"S tough, John. . . . Now, according to my—according to *your* theory, I mean,

we haven't accounted for the woman in the case. She *might* have been the one hired to steal the love-notes, but— You haven't asked her about the gardenia."

John Garth turned to Beth Caruth.

"Lady, what was it you'd started to tell Rick Benton about a gardenia?"

FOR the first time Beth Caruth appeared to be startled.

"How—how did you know—about— Oh, I'm going to tell—*everything!*"

She caught her breath with a sob. She was verging on hysteria.

"Calm yourself, lady. Tell us just what happened."

"I was outside on the loggia, waiting for— for Rick. I heard the shot, and ran inside in time to see a man dart into the breakfast-room. I—"

"Just a second, lady. Who was the man?"

"I don't know—I don't know! I thought I knew, but I was mistaken! I thought it was Rick Benton—thought it was Rick, until he proved an alibi! That's why I lied and lied—to protect him. . . . I love him."

"You don't need to tell us that, lady. What made you think it was Rick Benton?"

"He wore a gardenia. Rick always wears a gardenia. I—I couldn't see the man's face. I thought it was Rick, so I snatched up the gun, thinking I was shielding him. I turned so quick I lost my slipper, and I had no time to get it before the servant came! It was my slipper you found there! Now, you know—you know everything! I've told you the truth!"

"It's easy to check on whether it's the truth," rasped Garth. "Mr. Clein! Where is Mr. Clein? . . . Oh, there you are! Mr. Clein, you were on the loggia smoking when the shot was fired. Did you see this lady?"

Valdo Clein snapped his lighter, and held the flame in front of the unlighted cigarette in his lips.

"I'm sorry if it makes trouble for her. But—I saw no one!"

John Garth turned back to the frightened girl.

"There! So you were telling the truth, huh?"

Quinn of the *Trib* nudged the detective, and whispered from the side of his mouth:

"Lay off of Cinderella, you big ox! You're scaring her nutty! It doesn't

prove she's lying. Maybe it proves *he's* lying!"

John Garth wriggled his broken nose, and pondered.

"He might fit in the picture, at that! Son of the wealthy diamond man who killed himself when he lost his money. Son is society clubman—high flyer—expensive tastes—needs money. Has entry into McLean's home. Who better could Richman have bribed to rob McLean's safe?"

Whispered Quinn of the *Trib*: "All men look pretty much alike in dinner-clothes. He could have worn the gardenia, so anyone who chanced to see him in the library would think he was Rick! But to get away with that, he had to be sure Rick was absent—hence the chewing-gum trick! And if he's the one who stole the slipper from the closet, he's not had a chance to get rid of it, yet!"

"Just what I had in mind!" growled the detective, who had accused the reporter of stealing the slipper. He cleared his throat and announced:

"All along I've known who the killer was—ever since he stole the slipper from the closet. I don't think he's had a chance to get rid of it, yet. I'm going to search every man in this room, and when I find the one with the slipper, we'll have the murderer! . . . You're first, Mr. Clein."

When John Garth had previously said the house was surrounded, Valdo Clein had been absent. Only Sergeant Garth stood between him and the French windows now—and the officer was well to one side. Valdo Clein was squeezing the incriminating slipper close to his side, under his dinner-jacket. He knew what it meant if it were found in his possession. So, with no warning whatever, he leaped for the windows.

ONE leap would have brought Detective Sergeant John Garth squarely in his path. His burly arms could have pinned the fugitive's arms to his sides. Valdo Clein would have been captured—to go to trial and, doubtless, to be acquitted through Richman's wealth and influence.

John Garth knew all this.

He leaped. But it was an awkward, clumsy leap. He seemed to trip over his own feet. He fell with a crash.

Valdo Clein sped through the French windows, to where the cordon of patrolmen waited, with orders to shoot to kill.

THE END

# REAL EXPERIENCES



## The Blizzard

*EVERY man's life, if all its facts were known, would make an interesting novel. At any rate, we believe every man's life has included at least one episode exciting enough to deserve record; and so we offer each month prizes for the best stories of Real Experience submitted. (For details see page 4.) It is not always the most unusual experience that makes the best story—as the following record of early days in Dakota will attest.*

By W. D. GAY

**F**ORTY-SIX years ago I was living in a little town near the headwaters of the Big Sioux, in the Dakota Territory.

I worked for a jeweler, repairing watches, and boarded with a widow, a Mrs. K—, who kept a modest place for lodgers. In return for room and board I cared for two Jersey cows and a pony, and split the firewood.

On the morning of the tenth of January, 1888, she said to her boarders at breakfast:

"There is a family living on a homestead twenty-two miles southwest of town, and I am worried for fear they may be out of supplies. There is a woman, a boy and two girls, and they live in a small homestead cabin. You know it has been thirty degrees below zero by the thermometer in our woodshed nearly every morning for the past three weeks. I am going to buy a sled-load of provisions, and will provide a good sled and strong team if I can find some one who will volunteer to take the supplies to the family. Is there anyone here who'll go?"

Now, it happened I knew this family—that is, I had met them. Their homestead bordered mine on the east. I knew their nearest neighbor lived two miles away. I also knew they had no team, no cow, no stock of any kind. The oldest girl was about seventeen, her sister two years younger. The boy was about ten.

Mr. H— was in the East at the time, trying to make enough money to feed them, but what he sent was very little. I used to go out to my homestead occasionally, as I was required to sleep in my shack once in six months in order to get title to my land. On nearly every trip I visited this family. Sometimes I took my violin with me, and the youngest girl accompanied me on the old reed organ, and sang the old tunes. They were fine people.

So when the landlady asked for a volunteer to carry supplies to them, I consented to go.

On the morning of the twelfth, I left the boarding-house with two tons of hard-coal; hams, sugar, flour, and I forget what else. I remember the name of the

magnificent beasts that were to draw the sled—John and Kate!

It was four o'clock before I got away. The sky was studded with pale, white stars which seemed so close to earth one could reach up and touch them. The weather had moderated somewhat: it was only twenty-six below zero. As I drove through the business section of the sleeping town I stopped in front of an all-night eating place and bought two boxes of chewing-gum and five pounds of chocolate candy. Then I started on my twenty-two mile trek over the frozen prairie.

As the miles slipped away I noticed the horses were laboring. Strong beasts they were, but the load was heavy, the road bad, and the way long. Each hour it had grown warmer, and I did not urge them. About one in the afternoon I drove up to the kitchen door of the lonely isolated homestead.

While the members of the family joyously unloaded the provisions and coal, I unhitched the horses, stabled them, gave them some hay from a near-by stack, and oats which I had brought with me.

The barn was a crude affair some twelve by sixteen feet, with a shed-roof seven feet high in front and six in rear. It was located about ten rods north of the house, and near by stood a small stack of hay and one of straw. These two stacks, by the way, had furnished this little family with fuel for more than four weeks.

After tending the horses, I went into the house—a fairly good one, and much better than the average claim-shack. It had two basement rooms, (which I noticed were not being used), and four rooms above, where the family lived.

Mrs. H— and the girls had dinner ready by two o'clock. And what a dinner! I had met a man on my way out who was on his way to town with four quarters of beef, and for three dollars and sixty cents I'd purchased one hind-quarter. How those starved people did enjoy that fresh beef, to say nothing of the other dishes they had prepared from the provisions Mrs. K— had sent them!

I HAD brought my fiddle, and when dinner was over I tuned up, and the younger girl and I played some of the old tunes. The hearty meal, the new face in their midst with news of the outer world, the music, all helped these good people forget their troubles for the time being. Everybody was happy.

But as the music went on, I noticed that the wind was coming up. The ice

was falling away from the windows. I put my fiddle on the organ, went to a west window and looked out over the vast plain of snow. While I stood there, I noticed something I have never seen before or since. The wind was rolling the snow into little pea-sized balls, and as far as the eye could see, it seemed the whole white face of the earth was slipping, creeping into the north.

And then I noticed something which really frightened me. At this time of day the sun hung low and pale in the southwest. Now, on either side of the suspended disk was a brilliant sun-dog, big out of all proportion, and directly above the sun was a dazzling band of fiery color displaying all the tints of a rainbow as the streamers shot nearly to the zenith. The sun-dogs themselves shot out colored streamers halfway across the horizon.

Out of the northwest now I noticed a bank of threatening dark gray clouds creeping into view. Then, from a window where she had been watching, the girl who had played for me called that the little snowballs were now moving south, not north! I ran to her side and looked out. Sure enough, they were going south. The wind had reversed!

Almost as suddenly frost whitened the edges of the windows. I immediately ran out to close the wooden shutters, heavy ones of matched lumber. After closing the last one I paused to look around before going in again. As I stood there, I saw a great cloud, almost black, speed out of the northwest with the speed of a cannon-ball, it seemed to me, for in a few minutes it dropped like a curtain over the dipping sun, and our little world was in darkness.

I went into the house, and we were talking about these strange signs, wondering what they portended, when a blast of air struck the house with such force we thought a huge store of dynamite must have been exploded near by. With this unusual burst of wind from the northwest came snow. The fingers of the gale picked it up from the plains until the air was thick and white. In an instant the walk to the barn was obliterated.

My next thought was of the horses. Could I have left a door or window open? I pulled on my overcoat, cap and gloves, and ran down the steps into the basement. There was an outlet on the south. I unlatched the door. I could not open it! The suction was so great I could not budge it. Finally after a sudden jerk

the door opened, and I found myself lying on my back on a pile of hard coal. Such was the force of that wind.

I went out, feeling my way along the south side of the creaking, quivering house. I must get to the barn. If a door had been overlooked, left open, two of the finest horses in that part of the country, worth three hundred dollars apiece, would be dead before morning.

As I came to the southeast corner of the house I was met by a sixty-mile gale, and the air was so full of swirling snow it seemed almost like thrusting my head into a snow-bank. I knew immediately I would lose my way if I attempted the trip to the barn. I retraced my steps to the basement, forced the door shut, and went upstairs.

THE balance of that day, that night, and the following day and night, the storm raged unabated. On the morning of the fourteenth, however, the sun came up clear, and not a breath of wind was stirring. All round the house for a space of perhaps fifteen feet bare ground showed. Immediately beyond were drifts as high as twenty-five feet, packed hard.

With an old ax and shovel I found in the basement I managed to cut a sort of stairway to the top of the snow. From this perch I looked for the barn. It was not to be seen. Neither were the stacks.

Then I tried to locate the barn by stepping in its supposed direction from the house. Settling upon a spot I tried to break through the top layer with my boot-heel. I could hardly make an impression on the hard, sand-like snow. I had seen an old rake in the basement. I went back for it.

For the next fifteen minutes I prodded around with that long handle, then gave up, for I felt sure I must not be near the barn or the handle would have struck the roof of the covered building. I called the members of the family, who came out bundled in everything they had, for it was forty below zero, or more. None of them could agree on where the building or stacks might lie buried. If this seems strange, let me remind you that there was absolutely nothing by which one could gauge distance. Just one smooth, deceiving expanse of glittering snow.

I sent the family back to the house, and continued punching holes. At last, after another hour of strenuous labor, my pole struck the roof of the barn!

I started in to dig. Before I had even outlined the proposed hole to a depth of

a foot I had broken the handle of the one tool I had with which I could dig, an old scoop-shovel.

After a conference with the members of the family, we decided to send the girls to a neighbor's, who lived two miles away. There lived a German with four stalwart boys. The mother bundled the girls in their warmest clothes and started them off.

The ground between our place and the German's was slightly rolling, and the mother stood on a huge drift near the house and watched the girls until they disappeared behind a distant rise. They evidently had gone down into a little depression. Soon they reappeared. The mother continued to watch their progress.

After the girls left I was busy with various chores, and was surprised when the mother called to me. I climbed the rude ladder I had cut in the snow-bank, and when atop the drifts she handed me a long spy-glass, such as is used on ships. She said nervously:

"Take a look at those two animals following the girls. Are they dogs?"

Through the glass, once it was focused, I could see the animals plainly. Steam spouted from their nostrils, their red tongues made a vivid spot against the white snow.

"No!" I answered. "Not dogs!"

I had not put the glass on the girls. When I did now, I saw they were running with all their might. They were making a dash up the last rise of land between us and the German's house. Without taking the glass down, I said to the mother:

"The girls are almost to the house. What you thought might be dogs are Canadian wolves, probably come down from Manitoba to hunt because of severe snows there."

Even as I spoke, giving her this information, we both saw a young man leave the distant house on the run toward the girls. I could see he was loading a rifle as he ran. Before he met the girls, he had killed one of the savage beasts, and the second disappeared over a rise, one hind leg dragging.

I cannot remember that this mother said a thing to me at this joyous moment. Life in that country was cruel. One lived if he could, and was prepared for anything.

It was not long before the girls were back, none the worse for their thrilling experience, and with them came two powerfully built young German boys.

They brought a coil of rope, a six-foot cross-cut saw,—one handle removed,—and a large pair of ice-tongs. After cordial greetings all round, they went to work as if this job were no novel occurrence.

The snow was sawed into two-foot blocks, over an area ten feet square above the barn door. The tongs were tied to the rope as the shaft went deeper, and while some helped pull the snow out of the pit, others pushed the blacks away. Thus a well was dug to the ground.

**I** FOUND the door shut; I had latched it securely the afternoon of the storm. But I could not pull it open. The German boys told me the barn was filled with snow and had frozen to the door. This was hard to believe, as the old barn was covered—sides, ends, roof, with two thicknesses of tar-paper, and battened down securely with lath. It seemed to me there was not so much as a nail-hole where the snow could get in, since the door had been closed all the time.

The boys laughed at my ignorance. One of them had brought a screw-driver, and proceeded to take off the hinges. Even then the door clung, and finally was broken to pieces before it could be cleared out of the way. There before us stood a solid wall of snow, in reality almost a wall of ice.

I immediately got my rake. I pushed it into the wall, and presently it struck an open space. I advanced it slowly. It contacted something soft that moved! The horse was alive!

As swiftly as we could, the barrier was sawed through, and a ghastly sight met our eyes. The two horses were still standing, but barely alive. Huge icicles ten inches thick reached from their bellies to the floor, anchoring them. Their fat warm bodies had melted the sifted snow as it collected on them, and it had turned to ice. Their tails were invisible, or rather they were a block of ice in form something like a horse's tail. No hairs were visible. They were frozen to the floor. Manes, foretops, were sheets of white. Their eyes were seemingly frozen shut. Even in that time of peril, the sight was enough to make tears come to every eye that beheld it.

After one glance at the horses, Mrs. H— had rushed to the house, and before we men had taken in the full state of affairs, she was back with two buckets of warm water, into which she had stirred several quarts of corn-meal. Those horses nickered hopefully even before she got in

the door with the food, for they were very hungry, having had nothing to eat after their hay had been eaten. All of this was devoured with the exception of the rosin-weeds, and wild rose bushes, which had found their way into the stack with the prairie hay.

They gulped down their warm rations, then made efforts to shake themselves free of the ice upon them. We helped, breaking the ice that fastened them to the floor. With the ax we broke up the ice under their feet and made an attempt to lead them from the barn after they were foot-free. They were so stiff, sore and weak they could hardly move. Once they were in the clearing in front of the door, we walked them around slowly, rubbing their bodies vigorously. Warm blankets from the house were brought, and they were covered.

The German boys had by this time begun to saw out blocks above, and in two hours a ramp was finished, up which the horses were led out onto the drifts.

We stabled them then in the basement of the house, where they received a good feed of oats. And while they filled their bellies with this, we located the haystack, cut our way down and brought a supply of hay for them. The next morning they seemed to be none the worse for their days and nights in the ice.

For the next few days I stayed and helped about the place, doing things a man could do better than could a woman or children. And during the long evenings we chatted, played and sang songs.

**W**HEN I left, I headed the team toward town, and took a straight cut to my destination. The snow was hard and deep; what few fences we passed lay far beneath the snow. The prairies were one sea of untrammelled white.

Upon my arrival at the boarding-house, I was at first appearance believed to be a ghost. My friends had given me up for lost. They had received no message of any kind since I left, and each day they had expected to find my body among those being brought in daily to the morgue, the bodies of men and women and children found frozen. . . .

The father, mother and elder girl of the family I visited are now dead, and the little boy is the wealthy vice-president of a nationally known concern headquartered in Minneapolis. The little girl with the yellow hair, the one who played the organ for me, is the mother of my five children.





# White Hunter

*Armed only with spear and shield like the natives he joined eight of them in attacking a lion.*

By ROGER COURTNEY

AT the age of nineteen, London-born, and intended for a banking career, I felt I could no longer resist the desire, that seemed to be in my very blood, for life in the African wilds. And overcoming strenuous family opposition to the extent that I was given a steamer ticket to Mombasa and fifty pounds, go I did.

My first employment in Africa was the prosaic one of clerking in a store. Followed a succession of jobs—with a sawmill company, gold-prospecting, and as a kind of ranger of a large timber concession on the Nandi Escarpment. There I took up ivory hunting, which at that time was very profitable. My next big-game activity was hunting buffalo—in order to sell their hides to a certain restive tribe that wanted them to make into war shields. Finally I was appointed a White Hunter.

It was no mean honor. Before a man was granted the government license that made him a White Hunter, he had to be proved a man of integrity, character, and experience in hunting and bushcraft. For a White Hunter is an expert who organizes and leads parties of untried people who want to go on safari—tourists, scientists, and big-game photographers.

(After some years of service as White Hunter in charge of safaris for all man-

ner of tenderfoot visitors to the Dark Continent, Mr. Courtney encountered a depression in his business even in Africa, and deciding to become a trader, established a post in a promising region of the great Rift Valley.)

WHAT with doctoring the babies, and anyone else who was sick, and being the means whereby regular supplies were obtained, I became more and more firmly established in the good graces of the people of the drought-stricken valley.

This friendliness was, of course, good for trade, and to that extent I welcomed it. But there were occasions when it was embarrassing, to say the least. One such was when it led me into agreeing to make one of a small party of young warriors who, armed only with spears and shields, were to go through the ordeal of facing a charging lion.

I was inveigled into this by a certain old chief who had something of a reputation as a wit. In the evenings when I camped near this village, I used to do a fair bit of hunting for the pot, and the old man, clad in a monkey robe, would come along and squat by my camp-fire, and swap yarns, and beg tid-bits from the carcasses. He was a smallish man, with a sharp face, eyes that were oddly pink round the edges, but with a kind of

grave twinkle in them, none the less, and a white scruff of beard that he constantly played with. He took a great interest in my 9.3 millimeter rifle, and in between pinches of snuff would ask questions regarding its range and killing power. One evening as he sat there, the twinkle in his eyes grew more pronounced, and he began to talk of the ceremonies attached to the making of a full-fledged warrior.

It was all very well for white men, he said. They had these fine guns that went "*boom-boom!*" and could kill the fiercest lion from afar. The white man had to be brave, of course, and a good hunter—but how braver were the young men who had to face the lion only with spear and shield?

I said it was certainly very brave of them, and all very interesting, and went on to talk of other things. But the old chief came back to his subject. Did young white men, he asked, have to go through anything of this sort before they were allowed to be called grown-up men, to take to themselves wives? He had heard it was not so, but that young white men were called grown-up and eligible for marrying as soon as they reached a certain age, and it didn't matter whether they had proved themselves brave men or not. It did not sound right to him, and he would like much if I told him the truth of the matter.

I had a growing feeling that the old fellow was poking sly fun at me; but I pretended not to notice it, and entering into what I thought was the spirit of the thing, proceeded to vindicate the courage of white men, even going so far as to say that although my accustomed way of hunting was with a rifle, I, for one, would not be afraid to tackle a lion with only a spear and shield, as he had said the young natives did.

At once I was sorry I had spoken. The old chief grinned, and the twinkle in his eyes became a sparkle. I knew he had caught me out in some way.

"It is well," he said, pulling at his scruff of beard. "Tomorrow morning a party of young men go out to blood their spears in the way of which I have spoken. The lair of a fine big lion has been found. All is ready. You can become one of the young men's party."

"I'll be damned if I will!" I cried, jumping up. The old chief had been working up to this. He was jockeying me into this damn, silly business of tackling a lion in this way. If this was the

chief's idea of a joke, I didn't like it. But as I was on the point of telling him so, I stopped. If I refused to go with the young men, the affair might get beyond the point of being a joke. Having declared I was not afraid to tackle a lion with a spear, my backing out now might be taken badly. They would think I was afraid.

Hence, I looked at the old chief, and gave what I hoped was a careless nod, though inwardly I felt very far from careless, and I told him I would join the party in the morning. I tried to let it be gathered that I considered the affair would provide a pleasing little change in the monotony of the days.

NEXT morning I awoke with a sinking feeling inside of me, and a firm conviction that in letting that damned old chief jockey me into a thing like this, I was the world's prize idiot. I went along to the place where the young men were being paraded, feeling that the chief's sense of humor was very definitely perverted.

The young men numbered eight—eight quivering young men of magnificent build. Each had a big war-shield of stout buffalo hide, a spear and a short sword. The swords hung from belts about their middles, and these belts were their only garments. In the light of the early morning, their naked bodies looked like wonderful pieces of sculpture which by some magic had been animated. All were painted, in varying designs, with red ochre and white wood-ash. They pranced and danced around, eager to be away to the place of the lion and in the fray. The whole of the village population stood around, watching.

There was a buzz of excited interest as I came up. I felt appraising eyes on me from all directions. I saw various black heads nod approval, as though their owners had decided I would acquit myself bravely and well. I felt grateful to them for those nods. Many of the young unmarried women seemed to be regarding me with special interest—or hope; perhaps they were thinking that as I was taking the native way of proving my manhood, I might also take a native wife. From being merely an attack on a lion by spear, the affair was developing in other directions.

I took my place with the eight young men, and was given, like them, a big war-shield, a short sword and a spear—this last having a blade of malleable iron,

but sharp as a razor. Then I was requested to remove my clothes; and at this it seemed to me a hush of expectancy ran through the watching crowd.

But I refused to take them off. I was not prepared to face the fury of a charging lion without the moral support of my trousers. There was, so to speak, no sense in adding indecent exposure to my troubles. The point was not pressed, however, and when presently we set out for the place of the lion, I was clad in my usual costume of khaki trousers and a sleeveless shirt.

A whole crowd of natives came with us, and on arrival at the area where the lair of the lion had been spotted, numbers of them spread out in a funnel formation, and began beating the bush at the wide end, with the object of driving the lion down to the narrow end, where the eight naked young men, and one respectably clad white man, stood and waited. All along the sides of the funnel formation, natives yelled and whooped, to keep the lion moving down the center. My eight young companions trembled with excitement; some were so nervously strung up that they sweated in streams, and made the ochre and ash painting on their body into a kind of mud. For my part—well, with every one of the waiting seconds, it was flooding over me more and more that while I was a pretty good man with a rifle, I knew horribly little about a spear. Hitherto, I had not thought of spear-throwing as being any particular kind of an art, but now it occurred to me forcibly that perhaps it called for a high degree of skill.

For half an hour we stood there at the narrow end of that funnel formation, waiting and watching. Then we saw the line of beaters breaking down some bushes at the farther end of the funnel, and suddenly a tremendous yelling went up, with the people at the sides of the funnel pointing and gesticulating.

Though we could not see him yet, the lion had been spotted and was being driven down to us!

**I** GRIPPED my spear firmly, and tightened my grip on the inside handle of the shield. I was on the right flank, between two young men so tense with excitement that it seemed if something didn't happen soon they would go crazy.

A few seconds later, the lion broke cover, and came full tilt at us, tossing his head from side to side, and snarling. He was a big brute, with immense chest

and shoulders, and very dangerous-looking.

There was a rattle of shields as the nine of us stiffened, and brought our spears to the ready. The lion had broken cover only a few yards from us, and was nearly on us now. The original idea had been that we were to charge together; but for one of the young men beside me, the tension proved too much. Unable to contain himself another second, he leaped forward and flung his spear at the advancing beast.

**T**HAT effort might have cost him his life, for the spear merely grazed the lion's neck, and the lion turned on him like a flash and struck at him. But quick as was the lion, the young warrior was quicker, and as the beast's great paw flung out at him, he dropped down on his back and pulled his big shield over him. The tough buffalo hide shield was a perfect protection, and the lion vainly clawed and struck at it.

At this, we all rushed in; and I know that I, for one, was mighty glad that the attention of the lion had in this manner been diverted from us. We got to work, and in a few seconds the lion fell, pierced by every spear in the company.

The ordeal was over, and we withdrew our spears, which, being of soft native iron, were twisted in all kinds of shapes.

That night we were acclaimed as great heroes, and there was a dance, and the tribe got howling drunk on native beer, and my companions in the spear-attack on the lion—the eight young men who now were full-fledged warriors—got so worked up that they became hysterical, and had to be led away twitching, clucking like a lot of schoolgirls. They were an extraordinary spectacle. . . .

Afterward, the old chief offered me blood-brotherhood with the tribe, and I accepted. Such an offer was a high compliment. Also, acceptance meant a further strengthening of the trading relations between us.

The ceremony was very simple. As we stood there by the camp fire, a small incision was made in the chief's right arm, and a similar one made on my right arm, and the two arms bound together till the blood intermingled. We then swore to stand by one another in all things, and the affair was over. There was about it all an almost casual note. But it was none the less a real and powerful bond. I was definitely a member of the tribe, and was treated as such.



# Abandon Ship!

*Seven times Captain Hartman has heard that dreaded call. He tells here of the most exciting of the seven.*

By CAPTAIN  
MILTON HARTMAN

OF all the orders given at sea, that most dreaded by mariners is the command, "Abandon ship!"

As a veteran of half a century at sea, it has been my lot to leave the sinking decks of no less than seven vessels. How well I remember the fearful cry that sent us racing to the boats. Memory pauses . . . I relive again a dark night, long ago, when first I heard that farewell of the sea: "Lower away!"

The tramp steamer *Wahloon* staggered and wallowed her way across the Bay of Biscay in a wild welter of water. On her flying bridge, behind the weather-cloth, the captain and his watch officer swayed like shadowy pendulums. Around them the gale howled like the fabled ten thousand demons. Flying spray steamed from their glistening oilskin coats as they clung to the rail and occasionally peered ahead to where the bow crashed into a succession of seas that flooded the forward well-deck, where the hatches, like black rocks on a reef, revealed themselves in the rushing waters.

It was an anxious time for the master and his second in command. The vessel beneath their feet had seen her best days. Her romantic past was written in her log: twenty years voyaging on the Seven Seas, most of it spent on the glamorous trade routes of the Orient. Tea, spices, silks, teak and camphor woods—aye, and jewels, had been her cargoes. After battling the storms of many seas the competition of more modern ships forced her into the coal and iron-ore trade.

I was quartermaster on watch at the time; it was my duty to steer the vessel. The storm made it doubly difficult to keep the ship on her course. Her deep-laden hull pitched and tossed dangerously, and I was glad that my watch was coming to an end.

"It will soon be eight bells," the skipper growled as he brushed the water from his brows and filled his pipe.

"Aye-aye, Cap'n," replied the mate as he gave his oilskins a hitch and crouched closer in the sheltered corner of the bridge. "I'll be glad to get below, sir, blowed if I won't."

The captain nodded in reply, turned his back to the gale—struck a match and with cupped hands lighted his briar pipe.

"There'll be no going below for me; the old hooker will need all the attention I can give her," he growled.

Clinging to the spokes of the wheel with hands that ached, my tired eyes glued to the swaying compass, anticipating every move the old vessel made, there I stood, rigid. The flood-light from the binnacle prevented me from seeing anything except the streaming water on the thick glass of the portholes. Suddenly, above the roar of the storm, eight bells echoed faintly along the sea-washed deck, followed by the cry of the lookout:

"Eight bells, an' all's well!"

DIMLY I heard the murmur of voices mingling with the storm's roar, as the watch mustered on the boat-deck. There was the sound of footsteps on the bridge-ladder. The sharp click of the latch rang out, and the lee door was thrown open just as the vessel gave a heavy roll. The captain with the watch officer clung to the opening until the ship righted herself, then entered. They were followed by my relief, a weakened old quartermaster who shut the door with a slam and clung to the handle; there was an air of indecision in his weatherbeaten face as he waited for the skipper and the mate to move aside. Just then the shrill squeal of the whistle on the engine-room tube drew the master's attention.

"That'll be the chief with a complaint," growled the captain in his beard as he drew off his sou'wester and threw

it on the couch. For a moment he stood in the light of the binnacle, brushing the water from his beard, a serious frown on his sunburned face. "The Scotchman is going to croak about some imaginary breakdown, I'll warrant," he grumbled as he crossed the deck and lifted the speaking-tube. "Hello!" he called below. "Aye, it's the captain speaking." There was a tense silence, as the skipper listened to what the chief engineer was telling him. Deep lines appeared in his bewhiskered face; after a time that seemed to me an eternity he replied:

"Aye-aye, Chief, you can slow down; that may help to relieve the pressure." With a muttered oath he let the tube-handle snap back and turned to his watch officer. "The chief says she is taking in water as fast as he can pump it out with both bilge-pumps working."

"That's bad," replied the mate.

"Aye, it's damn' bad, to my way of thinking," rumbled the skipper as he puffed for a moment on his pipe. "Iron ore is dangerous stuff to carry in a leaky ship. I expect it's those plates we sprung in the port bilge last voyage. I reported the matter to the owners and begged them to have the old hooker drydocked. They told me to let it slide for a while—grumbled about no profits—bad business. Blast 'em!"

"Aye-aye, sir," replied the mate with a broad wink. "I'll bet they doubled the insurance. If those damn' lubbers had to risk their lives on the old packet they'd jolly well see that her bottom was sound."

The captain was about to reply when he caught sight of my relief clinging to the handle of the door. "What are you barking there for like a dummy?" he barked. "Relieve the wheel."

"Aye-aye, sir," quavered my old ship-mate as he sidled up alongside of me.

"Nor'-a-half west," I said mechanically as I turned over the wheel to him.

"Nor'-a-half west," he echoed.

"Watch her close and don't let her pound any more than you can help," snapped the skipper. I opened the lee door, stepped out and slammed it shut.

I WAS wrapped in the embrace of the roaring gale, with the knowledge of the imminent danger of the ship ringing in my ears—iron ore—water coming in as fast as it can be pumped out—leak in the bilge-plates. For a moment I clung at the head of the bridge-deck ladder, the thunder beneath the bows mingling

with the roar of wind; then I breasted my way down the ladder to the boat-deck. I clung there an instant; then the old hooker gave a frightful wallow, shipped a sea fore and aft, and flung me high against the salt-coated funnel. With a thump I landed on the fiddley grating, where I lay stunned for a moment. The warm air from the boiler-room and a wisp of spray revived me. Painfully I crept to the iron ladder and clambered below, wet to the skin. It was very warm and comforting on the platform inside. The clang of the iron doors on the fire-boxes, and the rasping of the shovels mingled with the regular *tramp—tramp—tramp* of the antiquated engine as it urged the old hulk outward to do battle against the battery of seas the gale was piling up.

SUDDENLY my attention was drawn down through the iron grating to the two men on watch in the boiler-room—grotesque giants, their shadows weirdly thrown against the bulkhead, shoveling coal into the fiery mouths beneath the boilers.

"Say, look-a-here, Weasel," bellowed one as he cast his eyes sidewise at the steam gauge, "that gol-darned Dutchman and his mate are late again in relieving us. Wait until he comes down—I'll punch the big squarehead on the snout." As he said this, he slammed one of the fire-doors with a bang and pitched his shovel into a pile of coal.

A bulky shadow slipped past me, swayed down the iron ladder and landed with a clatter on the shining foot-plate. It was the Dutchman and he was alone.

"Vell, shipmates, here I vass," he boomed as he picked up a slice-bar.

"Late again!" bellowed Yank as he squared himself into a belligerent attitude. "What's the excuse this time?"

"Ach, Yank, I vill explanation everydings. Dhere iss drouble on deck, und I dink der ship has springed a leak."

"The ship sprung a leak; so that's your excuse, you—" yelled Yank as he struck the Dutchman square on the chest and slammed him up against the bulkhead. Dutchy came back at him with the roar of a bull. Back and forth they fought in the golden light of the ash-pans, the battle favoring first one then the other. Suddenly the ship gave a frightful roll to starboard; the Dutchman lost his foothold and fell; his head struck against the injector-pump with an ominous crack, and he lay still.

I was trembling with suppressed excitement, rooted to the spot, then—

I saw the chief engineer appear from between the boilers. He was wiping his hands with a piece of oily waste. "Pull the fires, Yank, and shut all the watertight doors on the coal-bunkers. Tie down the safety-valve and then get on deck. Our day's work is done."

"What's the big idea, Chief?" inquired Yank.

"The old tub is on her way to Davy Jones," replied the chief. "Carry out my orders and get to your boat station. I'll secure the engine-room door as I go through."

"Aye-aye, Chief," yelled Yank as he threw open the fire doors.

"Strike me bleddy well pink, Yank!" screamed the cockney. "I'm a-going on deck. Look, the blarsted water is coming over the bloomin' foot-plats."

"Oh, no, you won't, Weasel!" roared Yank as he paused in his work and backed against the iron ladder. "You'll damn' well stay here and do your duty!"

Whimpering, the cockney clawed at the handles of the bulkhead-door and carried out the order.

THE water was now ankle-deep and swept from side to side as the men worked. Spellbound, I watched the burly fireman pull fire after fire. The glowing clinkers fell with a loud hiss. Clouds of acrid steam arose, through which Yank's shadowy figure could be seen swinging his arms as he carried out his orders.

"*All hands abandon ship!*" Faintly the cry came to me from the deck above. In an instant my tongue was loosed.

"*All hands abandon ship!*" I screamed. "Yank! Weasel! Quick, come on deck before it's too late!"

"Say, Weasel, get a move on you!" roared Yank. "Give me a hand on this damn' safety-valve."

"Gawd blimy!" shrilled the cockney as he scrambled and clawed his way through the black water toward his watchmate. "Let's get on deck afore we're drowned like rats!"

"Here, you damned rat yourself!" barked Yank. "Lay ahold of this chain and pull!"

There was a hiss and roar as the steam blew off, and faintly again I heard that fateful cry: "*All hands abandon ship!*"

The burly Yank pushed the cockney halfway across the fire-room, then he stooped to pick up the inert form of the

Dutchman as if it was a sack of grain. He started to clamber up the iron ladder. "Follow me," he yelled back at the gibbering Weasel.

"The damned Dutchman is heavy," he growled, taking no notice of the scared cockney's cries on the ladder below.

I could hear the whistle and rattle of blocks on the davits as I crawled up the ladder to the boat-deck. Suddenly the lights went out, and the Weasel gave a despairing cry: "For Gawd's sake, 'urry up, Yank!"

As I drew myself above the hatch-combing, a rocket with a long fiery tail streamed upward from the deck. I noticed that one boat was already lowered and being carried away from the side of the ship on the crest of a huge wave. The other boat had just been lowered, and was alongside in danger of being smashed to splinters as the old vessel rolled. The captain stood by the rail, a flare in his hand lighting the scene.

"Has everyone been accounted for?" he bellowed as he held the flaming torch high over his head and peered along the deck. In a moment he caught sight of us scrambling from the fiddley-hatch. "Come on, men, get a move on!"

"Gawd blimy," gibbered the Weasel as he scrambled over me and scampered along the deck to the boat.

I was not far behind him when he reached the side. I scrambled over the rail. Yank, with the unconscious Dutchman, was beside me. I could never remember just how we managed to get into the boat, but we did it somehow. It was bobbing crazily up and down like a cork when I looked up and saw the captain, the last to leave, slide down the line. There was a crash, a rattle of oars and a hoarse cry. "*Out oars! Shove off!*"

WE drifted away from the sinking ship on the crest of a huge wave. I had an oar in my hand, pulled on it. It seemed to me that above the roar of the storm I heard that cry:

"*All hands abandon ship!*"

After a time I was able to look around and occasionally caught a glimpse of the doomed vessel, thrown into weird relief by the flare that the captain had stuck in her rail. A big sea caught the boat and carried us along on its broken crest. Desperately I pulled at my oar.

"There she goes," some one cried. I looked astern, and saw the *Wahloos* slide sideways beneath the tumbling waters on her way to Davy Jones' Locker.



# Drug-Store Detective

*An undergraduate pharmacist undertakes to capture a counterfeiter.*

By BILL ADAMS



MY experience as an amateur detective leads me to make two observations: first, leave the task of running down criminals to the men who are paid for it; and second, if you cannot resist the urge to bring crooks to justice, at least show the men who are paid to do it the consideration of taking them into your confidence.

I know whereof I speak, because I hold the singular honor of being the only amateur detective who ever landed two secret-service agents of the United States Government in jail. No, maybe they took me to jail. Well, you can judge later on who pinched whom.

I was a clerk in a downtown drug-store. Chemistry had always been my hobby. I studied it in high school and scanned every book on the subject that I could get hold of. My ambition was to be a registered pharmacist, but it meant four years' more schooling—an ambition I could not achieve until I succeeded in expanding my bank-roll.

I was not permitted to fill prescriptions, but when the other clerks were busy, I was permitted to sell stock chemicals and standard-brand medicines. I never missed the chance to pass myself off as a pharmacist.

One day a well-dressed man came into the store. He asked to see the druggist, or the owner of the place. I told him he was out, and he then asked for the prescription man. This individual was in the basement storing away a shipment of bonded whisky which had just arrived. I knew he did not want to be disturbed.

Now, I could not say he too was out, because the law requires a registered man be on the job every minute the

drug-store is open. However, figuring the man wanted nothing except something for a stomach-ache or some aspirin, I took a chance I had taken before and told him I was the pharmacist.

"Very well," said the man, in a matter-of-fact tone. "I want three ounces of bromide of potassium, one ounce of iodide of potassium, and three ounces of nitrate of silver."

The request was nothing to puzzle a pharmacist—not even a pseudo one as I was; the things he wanted are all well-known basic chemicals. The only suspicious thing about the order was the quantities. All are usually sold by grams, and then as an ingredient.

I filled the order, and he was paying me when he seemed to think of something as an afterthought.

"Oh, yes, I forgot," he said. "Have you any gelatine?" And he mentioned a particular kind.

I knew we had none. I doubt if any drug-store keeps it. I advised him to try some paint-store. He thanked me and left. I thought nothing more of the customer until two days later, when he came into the store again. I was back in the prescription-room, but spied him through the peephole. The registered pharmacist waited on him. When he came to the back room, I asked him what the fellow bought.

"Silver nitrate—three ounces," he said.

I said nothing, but I was churning over in my mind what this man wanted with so much silver. Well, it really should be no business of mine. There was no law against anybody buying as much silver nitrate as they pleased, so long as they had the money.

One week passed before I saw the mysterious silver fiend again. The druggist was filling a 'scrip, and asked me to see what he wanted. I knew in advance. Sure enough, more nitrate of silver, and this time another dose of bromide of potassium. He gave me a ten-dollar bill and I returned him his change.

THE boss always went home early. The pharmacist and I checked up on the cash and closed up about midnight. I noticed the registered man standing before the cash register examining a bill. He called me.

"Say, did you take this bill in?" he asked. It was the only ten taken in since the bank-deposit in the afternoon.

"Yes. What's wrong with it?"

"I've handled a lot of paper dough in my day," he replied, "and if I'm not dead wrong, this is a phony."

He handed it to me, and I held it to the light. It was a counterfeit, all right, but a very clever job. Even the silk threads were in it. The pharmacist decided to make sure, and went to the back room, where he washed it with some chemical. The bill split in two. Two pieces of paper had been pasted together—both so thin that when joined, they formed the thickness of a genuine bill.

"Who gave it to you?" he demanded.

It was at that moment that my ambitions to be a druggist gave way to the desire to be a detective. I lied. I said I did not remember who gave it to me.

"What are we going to do?" the prescription man asked. "The register will show we are ten bucks short. If we re-paste it and send it to the bank, they'll turn it over to the Government, and we're holding the sack."

Then I did what I thought then was a noble thing. I dug into my savings and produced a ten-dollar bill and asked the pharmacist to replace the loss and give me the fake note. He did this.

I was off duty all morning next day and spent the time perusing every book in the public library that had anything to do with counterfeiting. Most of them gave me little information. There were volumes on clever counterfeiting, and statistics on losses to Uncle Sam, and exhortations on the futility of trying to get away with it; but nothing on what I wanted—the process.

Like everybody else, the first things I thought of at the mention of a counterfeiting plant were printing presses, en-

gravings and various metal-eating acids, none of which had been purchased by the mysterious man. At the end of one article one passage held my attention. It read: "The futility of photography in counterfeiting enterprises is due to the fact that color photography has never been perfected; also the impossibility of sensitizing both sides of a piece of paper so that one side will not print through onto the other."

This afforded me my supreme hunch. I immediately went to the chemistry rack and got a formula book. The index led me to what I wanted. There it was: formula for bromide photographic printing paper: bromide of potassium 20 grams; iodide of potassium 4 grams, nitrate of silver 25 grams, and so forth; but the real victory was won when I came to the second solution, which required gelatine of the precise grade my customer had asked for when he first visited the store.

Now is when I made mistake No. 2—the first was when I refused to report the matter to the authorities at once. I decided to keep the matter secret and solve it myself. I laid my plans carefully.

I was required, among other duties at the store, to run a few errands that were close by, and when the delivery boy was out. I arranged to hold back some of the deliveries so that I could be in a position to leave whenever the silver-buyer appeared again.

I DIDN'T have to wait long—in two days he was back. He bought only a small quantity of chemicals and paid in genuine money—one-dollar bills. When he left, I grabbed my hat and followed.

I trailed the man for eight blocks until he went into an office building just one block from the police-station. This, thought I, was very clever of him: the closer to the police, the less the suspicion. I just entered the door of the building when he went up in the elevator. When it returned, I asked the boy who the man was, that he looked like an old friend. Detective that I was, I knew this was crude shadowing indeed, but it elicited the information. The man was a "Mr. Brandon," and he had a portrait studio on the fourth floor.

I made my delivery and returned to the store. I waited on customers vacantly, my thoughts occupied solely on how I was to gain entrance to Brandon's office and find out what was inside. I could call as a customer, of course, but

I would be recognized and on the surface the place would look legitimate. I must get in late at night and pry around.

When the store closed at midnight, I slipped a .32-revolver from a drawer into my pocket, bade the pharmacist good night and left, ostensibly for my room. I circled the building where Brandon had his office. There were few offices lit up. Finally they became dark. The entrance to the building was never locked.

WITH thrills racing up and down my spine, I grasped the revolver, and entered the building. The elevator apparently stopped running at midnight. There were only a few dim hall lights burning, and as I climbed the stairs, I had a guilty feeling several times that I was biting off more than I could chew: What if Brandon should be in and show fight? What if I killed him—or he me? What if he was entirely innocent, and bought the chemicals for legitimate purposes?

When I reached the fourth floor, my heart was pounding like a triphammer. There was not a sound, and I discerned by the hall light a sign on a door near the elevator: "H. G. BRANDON, *portrait photographer*." I tiptoed to the door and held an ear against it. There was not a sound or evidence of any activity.

Confident I was the only one on the entire floor, I grew bolder. What made me do the foolish thing of trying the door I do not know. Of course it was locked. The transom, too, was tight. Investigating along the hall further, I found the office next to Brandon's was not occupied and the door part way open. There was a connecting door between this empty room and Brandon's office. It was locked, but the transom was loose. I returned to the hall and got a large fire-extinguisher which I stood on, and lifted the transom. Then I raised myself to the top sill and leaned in far enough to turn the knob of the spring lock.

I returned the fire-extinguisher to the hall and made certain no one was climbing the stairs. Returning to the empty office, I slowly opened the door which led to Brandon's office. Inside, was the usual apparatus for taking pictures—painted backgrounds, portrait camera, light-bulbs, and so on. I was not interested in these. I went to the dark room which had been built at one side of the room. Inside were stacks of plates. I knew it would take me a day to inspect

them all. I closed the door so I could turn on the bright light and inspect the place without being seen from outside.

I rummaged in files and drawers, trying to replace everything as nearly as possible. Then I noticed a box labeled "*Do not open even in faint non-actinic light—super-special plates*." This aroused my suspicions. I took a chance. Without switching off the light, I opened the box, and after holding to the light six or seven glass negatives of people he had photographed—I came to the bottom.

There they were! Two perfect plates of photographed ten-dollar bills. I jubilantly replaced the other plates in the box and wrapped the damaging plates in a piece of blotter. Just then some one tried a key in the door. I could hear men whispering. I fled to the dark-room and pulled the door almost shut.

After several minutes the door opened and two men came in. Through the slit in the dark-room I could see their forms. Neither said anything, and they did not turn on the lights. One was the size of Brandon, but I could not be sure. At least, I decided, they were confederates of the counterfeiter.

I could stand the suspense no longer. Gripping the plates in one hand and the revolver in the other, I slowly opened the door. It creaked, and both men looked toward me. I leveled the revolver at them and shouted "Hands up!" Both raised their hands. I went to the switch near the door and turned on the light.

Neither of the men was Brandon.

"You're under arrest," I said.

"What for?" asked one.

"For counterfeiting."

Both smiled, instead of being terrified.

"Who are you?" one of the men put in.

I had to think fast. I knew I would have to put up some sort of front.

"I'm with the United States secret service," I said, trying to put a harsh tone in my voice.

BUT the startling revelation failed to make the impression I expected.

"Where's Brandon?" I demanded. One of them said they'd like to know. But I knew that was a stall.

"Well," said I, "the jail is only one block away. Come on—I'm going to walk you over." I felt in their hip pockets and found no guns. (I wonder to this day why my detective instinct didn't prompt me to feel under their shoulders).

I let them lower their arms as I walked behind them down the stairs.

When we reached the street, I kept the gun on them from my pocket.

We entered the police-station and I asked a clerk at the office for the chief. When he came from his office, I had a sick feeling in my stomach as he greeted one of the men:

"Hello, Jim. What's up?"

"What's up?" Jim repeated, grinning.

"Why, we've had our arms up for ten minutes. We're under arrest."

Then, disregarding any thoughts of being shot from my revolver, they gave me a shove into the Chief's office.

"Now, kid," said Jim, "come clean. What's this all about?"

"Who—who are you?" I managed to ask.

The fellow named Jim brought a folder from his inside coat pocket. There was his picture, and among other inscriptions on the card were: "*United States of America, Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Criminal Investigation.*"

Hopelessly sunk, I slowly told my story. As I finished, I expected nothing less than a two-hundred-year sentence.

Finally Jim said:

"I think the kid's telling the truth."

I gathered by the talk which followed among them that the two operatives had gained entrance to Brandon's office by a skeleton key and were waiting to arrest him when I burst forth. The officers let me know that I was technically under arrest, but that I would be permitted to return to my work next day. I went home, but could not sleep.

Next morning I found Jim, the Government man, waiting for me when I came to work. He explained that Brandon had not showed up at his office all night, nor so far that morning. He apparently had another office, or had moved to new quarters without taking his equipment. He instructed me to be on the watch for Brandon. Jim, with his partner would be in a car across the street all day, and if the man came in, I was to come to the front window and wave a towel as if I were washing the window.

Morning and afternoon passed without a trace of Brandon. But at nine o'clock at night he came in; he seemed excited but did not buy any chemicals. He bought two cigars and presented a ten-dollar bill to me.

"I'll have to get change at the register up at the front of the store," I told him.

As I passed the soda fountain, I grabbed a towel, and boy, did I wash that window?

# A Sky-High Wedding

*Two young people start married life with a wild ride in a balloon.*

By FRANK  
BERKEY

**I**N the summer of 1891 I was living in Denver, working as a steamfitter's helper. Times were hard, business dull, and jobs scarce.

At that time I was keeping company with the little lady who has been my wife for these many years, and it was understood between us that when we had accumulated enough to make a start at housekeeping, we would get married. But that summer the outlook for us was gloomy in the extreme.

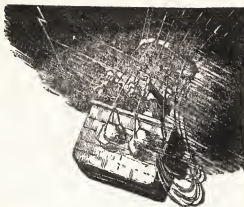
One evening as I was returning home from work Glen met me on the street—all excitement, her eyes shining with animation—with a newspaper in her hand. "Frank, here's our chance. Read this!" she exclaimed joyously, shoving the paper in front of my nose.

The article she pointed out was an advertisement offering one hundred dollars to the couple who would have their marriage ceremony performed in Baldwin Brothers' balloon, and make an ascension with them on the following Sunday afternoon, from Elich's Gardens.

"You certainly don't intend for us to take up any crazy proposition like that, do you?" I asked in dismay.

"Crazy!" Glen cried indignantly. "Why, it's the sanest way I know to raise the money we need so badly, and I'm game to go through with it, if you are."

I am not air-minded now, and I assure you I was not then, but in spite of that she finally badgered me into going with her to accept the offer. After considerable search we located the manager at Elich's, but he informed us that we were too late—another needy couple had beaten us to it. I breathed a sigh of relief, but poor Glen was nearly in tears. She had had a pretty tough time of it during her life; an orphan, she had been forced



to shift for herself early in life, and the position she then held—a waitress in a restaurant—was very distasteful to her.

She was silent as we walked out of the park and boarded a downtown car.

"What's on your mind, Glen?" I finally inquired. "You mustn't take this disappointment so much to heart."

She sat regarding me thoughtfully. "Frank," she said, "the manager at Manhattan Beach will have to meet Elich's offer, and I'll bet you the ice-cream that he has an ad in the morning papers. We'll slip out there right now, and cinch the offer before he has announced it publicly."

I was dumfounded. Manhattan Beach was a rival amusement park, and had been offering balloon-ascensions by Professor King, an old aeronaut who had a very small balloon. "But Glen," I remonstrated, "we will be risking our lives if we go up in that small balloon of Professor King's."

"Oh, fudge," she gibed. "You've got cold feet. Look at Mr. King—an old, gray-headed man—hasn't he been making balloon ascensions for years, and isn't he still among the living? Of course we'll go." And of course we went.

When we interviewed the manager at Manhattan Beach, and it turned out just as Glen had reasoned it would; for he smilingly admitted that he had made all arrangements with the Professor, and he willingly gave us the contract. He instructed us to get our marriage license on Saturday, and to be at the park not later than three o'clock Sunday afternoon—and most important of all—not to embarrass him by backing out, as he intended to give the event extensive advertising. We assured him that he could depend on us.

The Sunday afternoon we were to make the ascension was hot, and with the exception of a few clouds forming in the mountains, the sky was clear; apparently it was an ideal day for us to make our trip. We arrived at Manhattan Beach somewhat earlier than the time specified in order to inspect the air ship, and I assure you that we got one big surprise. Instead of one balloon there were three—in a cluster; two small balloons were placed opposite to each other on the sides of the larger balloon, securely attached to it and the basket in which we were to take our little trip.

Professor King explained to us, when we questioned him about the peculiar contraption, that his large balloon did not have sufficient buoyancy to lift three persons to the required height without the auxiliary balloons; he assured us that the three balloons were as safe—in fact safer than one of immense size, and he stated that he had frequently used three and even more when the occasion required. Noticing my dubious expression, he smilingly told us to feel no concern about making the ascension, as it would be only a short, pleasant adventure that we would never regret.

The hour for the ascension arrived. The balloons were anchored so that the basket hung beside an elevated platform—Professor King stood waiting inside the basket. We followed the manager and the minister up the steps leading to the platform. The manager raised his hand, and asked for silence. He then introduced Glen and me as the two young people who had consented to be married in the basket of the balloon, and make an ascension later with Professor King. Counting out five crisp, new twenty dollar bills, he handed them to me; then he patted us on the back, wished us a pleasant trip, and abundant happiness on our journey through life. At a nod from the Professor we climbed into the basket and stood beside him; the minister remained on the platform during the ceremony.

THE crowd, which was fairly quiet until the minister had pronounced us man and wife, cheered lustily, a band commenced playing, the balloon fastenings were loosened, and we were off. The cheering crowd commenced to sink slowly away, and, while we ascended higher and higher, it seemed to us that we remained stationary, as there was no sensation of motion. The sight, as we looked down on the panorama spread

before us, was wonderful and exhilarating; but shortly another sight claimed our undivided attention. We were startled by a distant roll of thunder, and as we turned and looked toward the Rockies, a most appalling sight greeted our eyes. A thunderstorm was sweeping out of the foothills, and advancing rapidly toward the city. Flashes of lightning streaking across black, wind-driven clouds, rumbling peals of thunder, gradually becoming louder and louder as the storm approached us, filled us with terror, as we realized how helpless we were to seek refuge from it. The storm covered only a small area, but we were directly in its path, and it was plainly evident we would be unable to ascend above the clouds before it reached us.

THE professor, seeing our dismay, calmly assured us there was no cause for alarm, as it was just a little thunder-shower that would soon pass over; that, at the worst, it would only rock the basket a little. In a few moments the storm struck us, and rock the basket it did with a vengeance. As we clung, with bated breath, to the ropes that attached the basket to the balloons, the first onrush caught us, and tossed us and flung us before it, as we trailed beneath the swaying gas-bags driven by the fury of the storm. A dense, chilling mist enveloped us—there was a tremendous clap of thunder that almost stunned me, and, when I recovered my wits a few moments later, it seemed to me that we were descending—that it was becoming lighter about us. I looked at Glen, and I saw that her face was white and drawn. She motioned for me to look upward; when I did I was horrified—the large balloon had burst, and was waving like a great sheet in the wind! Our only salvation from being dashed to the ground was the buoyancy of two small auxiliary balloons.

As I stared at the dreadful sight the Professor grabbed my arm, and shouted in my ear: "Empty these sand-bags over the side of the basket as I open them." When I had emptied the last one he leaned toward me. "You two climb up the ropes as far as you can; it will break the shock when we land. Hurry!" he commanded.

I repeated his instructions to Glen; she bravely commenced to climb up the network of ropes, and, as I followed, I noticed that the basket was swinging with less violence, and I surmised that

the wind was subsiding. We were shivering, and soaked to the skin from the rain that was still falling, but the sun was beginning to show through the clouds—the storm had passed on. As I looked downward I was surprised to see that Professor King had made no attempt to climb the ropes, but was standing in the basket looking intently at the rapidly approaching landscape. The brief tempest had blown us southeast of the city, and in this fortune favored us, as we would make our landing on the open prairie—in a very few moments.

I cautioned Glen to hang on to the ropes for dear life, as we were about to alight. The words were scarcely out of my mouth when the basket struck the ground with such force that the brave old Professor was knocked senseless. Glen and I were spared much of the shock of contact by reason of our position, but we were slammed against the basket, and thrown from side to side as we clung desperately to the ropes. The two balloons, driven by the light wind, dragged us, bumping along over the ground, until our combined weight finally brought it to a standstill.

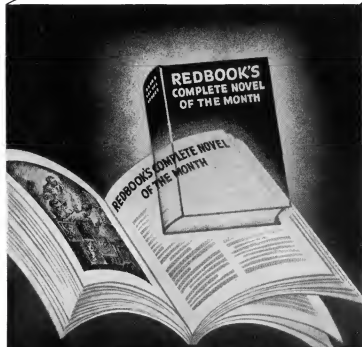
Glen and I—bedraggled, bruised and breathless from our exertions, crawled out from under the tangle of ropes and the wreckage of the large balloon, sincerely thankful to be alive. After considerable effort we managed to get the old Professor from under the debris, and for a few moments we feared that he was seriously injured; but he recovered consciousness in a short time, and aside from being slightly dizzy-headed, he declared himself little the worse from his experience.

WE saw two men hurrying toward us from a ranch house a quarter of a mile away, and Glen and I went to meet them. The men expressed great surprise on learning that none of us had been killed, or even injured, and declared that from where they were watching we seemed to be coming down like a ton of brick. The Professor made arrangements with them to convey us back to the city, and by the time we had the two balloons deflated and loaded, the sun was shining brightly, and Glen and I were as happy as larks. Everything looked rosy to us, as we sat, disheveled and dirty, perched on top of a load of balloons, jolting along in an old lumber wagon, in the late afternoon of our wedding day—over forty years ago.



# "BETWEEN 4 AND 5"

BY E. S. LIDDON



THIS  
MONTH'S  
COMPLETE  
NOVEL

● "Between Four and Five", Redbook's Complete Novel-of-the-Month for April, brings you a full-length murder mystery that is guaranteed to keep the electric lights burning until the wee sma' hours. The vanishing brooch, the talking table and the strange visitor are just a few of its exciting ingredients. It is by E. S. Liddon, who has the distinction of having her first novel accepted simultaneously by Redbook Magazine and a leading book publisher. This thriller will cost \$2.00 in book form, but you get it complete in this issue of Redbook! Don't miss it!

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***Camel's  
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